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Voices of Canadians: Seeking Work-Life Balance

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Preface

This report is not an academic study. Instead, it is a compilation of the comments of Canadian workers regarding how they feel about the stress they are facing in their daily lives as they seek to balance work and family.

Stress levels have increased as the work environment has changed in the last decade in response to downsizing, globalization, competitive pressures and technological change. In addition, broader and fundamental changes in society and the family have contributed to the problems inherent in balancing competing responsibilities. The views of the individuals documented here underscore the degree to which all these changes have affected individuals at work, at home and in their personal life.

To highlight the immediacy of these issues, the comments have been left largely in people's own words. Consequently, they provide a window on how people experience and react to stress and the ways they find to try to deal with it.

These expressions of stress are drawn from the 10,000 comments provided by participants in Health Canada's 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study. The survey covered workers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors in a wide range of large organizations across Canada.

Almost two-thirds of the comments are about the difficulty of achieving work-life balance, especially problems at the organizational level (which account for over 40% of the comments overall). Somewhat fewer concerns, but still a significant number, were voiced about how work and family interrelate and the difficulty of balancing competing demands and expectations. A minority of the comments were positive. Some responses contained recommendations on how to reduce stress levels or achieve work-life balance.

By documenting people's responses in their own words, this report illustrates very clearly how people are experiencing often extreme levels of stress due to the conflict between work and home. This report is therefore a valuable record that provides first-hand insights into a burgeoning problem for individuals and organizations.

Introduction

The issues associated with balancing work and family are of paramount importance to individuals, their employers, their families, their unions, and governments concerned with global competitiveness, citizen well-being and national health. Although much has been written about the topic, only a handful of “high impact” studies have been conducted on this subject in Canada. Despite the fixation of the popular press on the topic (reflecting its readers' interest) there is, at this time, little sound empirical data available to inform the debate. This is unfortunate, as credible research in this area has the power to change how governments and employers think about the issue and how they formulate and implement human resource, social and labour policy.

A decade ago we, along with our colleagues Dr. Catherine Lee at the University of Ottawa and Dr. Shirley Mills at Carleton University, conducted a national study of work-life conflict in Canada to “explore how the changing relationship between family and work affects organizations, families and employers.” In total, 14,549 employees from 37 medium-sized and large private sector organizations and 15,921 employees from seven federal public service departments participated in this research.

A lot has happened with respect to work and family life in the 10 years since we conducted our first study on work-family balance. Academic research on the topic has burgeoned. Nationally, the 1990s was a decade of turbulence for working Canadians as companies downsized, rightsized, restructured and globalized. The recession of the early nineties was followed by the “jobless recovery” of the mid-nineties, and job security was the issue that absorbed many working Canadians and their families. Organizations, faced with a glut of competent employees from which to choose, often paid little attention to becoming “best practice” with respect to human resource management.

Throughout the nineties, technological change and the need to be competitive globally increased the pressures on organizations and employees alike. Time in employment increased for many, as did the use of non-standard types of employment. Non-work demands also increased over the decade as family structures continued to change and the percentage of working Canadians with childcare, eldercare or both (the sandwich generation) continued to rise.

Paradoxically, as we enter the new millennium there has been a complete about-face with respect to this issue as employers, faced with impending labour shortages, have become preoccupied with recruiting and retaining “knowledge workers.” Such employers have recognized that a focus on “human capital” is one key to increased productivity for the workforce of 2002 and beyond.

Taken together, these changes suggest it is time for another rigorous empirical look at the issue of work-life conflict. This report presents data collected during such an endeavour.

The 2001 Health Canada Work-Life Conflict Study

In 2001, Duxbury and Higgins conducted a national study on work-life conflict. This study, which was funded by Health Canada, was undertaken to examine the issues associated with work-life conflict, identify Canadians at risk, identify why key stakeholders (governments, employers, employees) should care about the issue by determining the “bottom line” impact of conflict between work and life, and provide direction on ways to move forward.

The study sample consists of 31,571 Canadian employees who work for public sector (federal, provincial and municipal governments), private sector and not-for-profit (defined in this study to include organizations in the health care and educational sectors) organizations. All employees in the sample came from organizations employing 500 or more people.

In total, 100 companies with more than 500 employees participated in the study: 40 from the private sector, 22 from the public sector and 38 from the not-for-profit sector. Private sector companies from the following sectors were included in the sample: telecommunications, high technology, retail, transportation, pharmaceutical, financial services, entertainment, natural resources and manufacturing. The public sector sample included 7 municipal governments, 7 provincial government departments, and 8 federal public service departments or agencies. The not-for-profit sector sample consisted of 15 hospitals or district health councils, 10 school boards, 8 universities and colleges, and 5 “other” organizations that could best be classified as not-for-profit/greater public service (e.g. social service, charity, protective services). The sample is nationally representative. Complete details on this study (i.e. description of the sample, description of the survey instrument) can be found on the Health Canada Web site listed below.¹

Data were gathered using a 12-page survey instrument. On the last page of the survey, we invited survey respondents to write any comments they might have about balancing work, family and lifestyle. Just under 10,000 people responded with substantive comments, of which 5,000 were considered in this analysis.² This report summarizes the stories they tell.

Analysis of the Respondents' Comments

The 5,000 comments were input, along with a unique survey identifier, into a computer. This resulted in over 1,200 pages of usable quotations. Atlas software was then used to content analyze and categorize the quotes. The unique identifier was then used to link the comment to the survey from which it came. This allowed us to compare those who provided comments to those who did not with respect to each of the measures collected in the survey. There were surprisingly few substantive differences (defined as a

¹ *The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study: Report One* (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/work-travail/index.html>).

² The following types of comments were not considered in this analysis: comments on the questionnaire itself (e.g. how long it took to fill it in, who else should receive it, how it had made them think about their life), explanations of answers and responses, suggestions on additional questions that should be included in future questionnaires, “thank yous” for doing the study, and critical comments about working.

difference of 5% or more) between the two groups. Not surprisingly, survey respondents with high work-life conflict (women, parents, employees with eldercare responsibilities, and those with higher role overload, higher work to family and family to work interference) were more likely to give comments than those whose lives were more balanced. This is not surprising given the stronger relevance of this topic to these individuals.

Initial analysis of the comments yielded a wide variety of types of comments – 33 categories in all! The types of comments we received were by no means evenly distributed. The vast majority of comments (64%) dealt with the challenges employees face balancing their work and their life. Within this group of comments, challenges faced at the organizational level dominated (41% of all comments dealt with problems or challenges at the organizational level). Problems experienced at the interface between work and family were discussed by 12% of the sample, while 9% talked about problems they were having at home that made balance problematic. Only 2% of those who gave comments talked about individual factors that contributed to work-life imbalance.

Only about 10% of those who gave comments offered remarks that could be considered positive in tone. The positive comments were fairly equally distributed among the following five categories: balance (2.1%), family (1.4%), their manager (1.2%), their organization (3.3%) and themselves (1.7%).

Just under 12% of the respondents offered recommendations on how balance could be improved. The majority of the recommendations (8.3%) dealt with policies that the respondents felt would help Canadians balance work and family. The other 3.5% of these comments were more general in nature and were directed at the organization.

Finally, 11.4% of those who gave comments talked about how they personally had achieved balance. These comments could be subdivided into three groups: personal solutions (5.1%), general solutions (4.4%) and solutions at the family level (1.9%).³

To answer the question “who made what types of comments?” we did additional statistical analysis. First, a number was assigned to each of the comment groups identified above. Second, we identified several key variables that we wished to include in this examination process. These variables included gender (male versus female), childcare (those who spent time each week in childcare versus those who did not), eldercare (those who spent time each week in eldercare versus those who did not), job type (manager versus professional versus other – which includes those who work in clerical, administrative, technical, retail and production type jobs), and sector (public versus private versus not-for-profit). Finally, the frequency with which the various types of comments were made by respondents in each of these groups was calculated. The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix A. Examination of these data indicate that there were very few substantive differences (i.e. differences of 5% or more) between the groups with respect to the types of comments given. This suggests that the results from this study likely reflect the opinions of Canadians who are employed by larger organizations. To assist the reader, all substantive between-group differences in the data are referenced in the report when relevant.

³ It should be noted that just over 2% of the comments could not be classified under any of these headings. For this reason, the percentages given in Appendix A do not add up to 100%.

Outline of the Report

This was a very difficult report to write due to an “embarrassment of riches.” As noted previously, our request for comments generated over a thousand pages of excellent commentary, which reflected hundreds of different concerns and suggestions. The 33 main categories of comments generated over 150 subcategories of issues (see Appendix B). This made it difficult to decide which issues and quotes to include in the document. In order to maximize the impact of the report, it was decided to pick a small number of representative comments for as wide a variety of issues as possible. Interested readers can, however, find a more complete set of quotes (as well as quotes on issues not included in this report) on the authors' Web site: <http://groups.ivey.uwo.ca/bantamaa/>.

The rest of the report is divided into five main parts, the first four of which correspond to the main categories of comments received. Part one focuses on the challenges and problems Canadian employees face as they try to balance work and life. Part two features positive observations with respect to work-life balance. Part three outlines how Canadians have achieved balance and focuses on personal solutions. Part four provides suggestions and recommendations on how governments, organizations and managers can facilitate work-life balance. The report concludes in part five with a summary and set of recommendations.

There is a vast academic literature dealing with the issue of work-life conflict. Most of the reports in this area focus on facts and figures. This report is different, in that it tells the stories behind the statistics by focusing on what Canadians have to say about their lives with respect to work, family and life. As such, it provides a clearer view of what both conflict and balance look and feel like from the point of view of Canadian employees and their families. It also explores what factors make balance problematic and looks at how Canadians and their families cope.

It is hoped that by putting a “human face” on the numbers, this report will provide business and labour leaders and policy makers with the impetus to develop and implement policies and practices that better support working Canadians. This report should also provide comfort to Canadian workers, as it demonstrates that they are not alone – other Canadians are facing the same set of challenges. By presenting quotes from Canadians who have achieved a balance, it may also give employees an improved understanding of how they can better cope with the multiple demands on their time and energy.

Part One: Challenges Faced by Employees with Respect to Balance

Work-life balance is not something that just happens. It involves the efforts of a number of partners: the employee, the organization for which the employee works, the family with whom the employee lives, and the society in which all are embedded. It involves mutual understanding and respect between all of these players. This section illustrates what happens when this delicate balance between work and life is disturbed.

The comments presented in this section indicate that balance can be thought of as a set of reciprocal relationships with a set of highly interdependent partners. Taken together, the comments offer compelling proof that decisions, actions or circumstances in any one of the work and life domains will have impact on the others. In other words, they debunk the “separate worlds” model that is still subscribed to in many Canadian businesses and in many parts of Canadian society.

Comments relating to three sets of challenges (representing the various work-life partners) are presented in this part of the report:

- those that arise at the level of the organization;
- those that flow from the interface between work and family; and
- those that come from the individuals themselves and/or have their origin in the family domain.

Problems and Challenges at the Organizational Level

While we talk about work and family balance being a partnership between individuals, the organizations that employ them and the family that supports them (and is, in turn, supported by them), the analysis of the comments done for this report would suggest that it is not a partnership of equals. In this survey, 41% of the comments provided by working Canadians dealt with problems and challenges at the organizational level. This would suggest that many Canadians attribute the challenges they face with respect to balance to their employer and how work is being managed. What factors at the organizational level make balance more difficult? Canadians identified the following factors:

- Heavy workloads
- Cultures that do not support balance
- The perception that one has to choose between career advancement and balance
- Constant change
- Management that does not support balance
- Lack of policies
- Temporary work
- Work-related travel

Also discussed in this section are organizational challenges facing three groups: “baby boomers,” teachers and nurses. Those readers who are interested in the problems facing older workers and not-for-profit sector employees such as teachers and nurses are advised to read *The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study: Report One*, which is on the Health Canada Web site. This section ends with two comments that seem to articulate all of the above concerns. Comments on specific work-life policies such as flextime, telework, and so on, were not included in this report but can be found on the authors' Web site at <http://groups.ivey.uwo.ca/bantamaa/>.

Finally, it is interesting to note that almost half (48%) of the men who provided comments at the end of the survey talked about challenges they were having at work. This compares with 39% of women who gave comments of this type.

Organizational Problems: Workloads

One in 10 of all comments (fully one in four of comments in the organizational problem category) dealt with the issue of workloads. Males, respondents in managerial and professional positions and respondents in the not-for-profit sector sample were all substantially more likely to talk about workload issues.

Respondents identified the following causes of heavy workloads:

- Downsizing
- Unrealistic expectations
- Being a manager
- Inability to plan and to set priorities
- Impact of office technology

Reading the comments below gives one the sense that balance is next to impossible if organizations continue to increase workloads.

Workload problems due to downsizing

“The downsizing and amalgamations of the 1990s have impacted my work/family and lifestyle in the following ways: I work weekends and evenings because I have to in order to keep ahead (this is the same with my co workers). Because I work long hours, this affects my family and my leisure time. Because of reduced leisure time, stress and anxiety have increased. Workloads are increasing not only because of reduced staffing but also as a result of the improved economy. We are being pressed to make unrealistic deadlines. In summary, I enjoy my job but am very concerned that the excessive demands and increasing workload will adversely affect my health (mental/physical) and my family (marriage and relationship with children).”

“Downsizing has resulted in overworked staff with unreasonable workloads. When a company has undergone so much restructuring, one does not feel that one is able to say no to workloads or overtime. “Flexible hours” to me these days means you can come in earlier and leave later and you can work through lunch.”

“Even though our organization talks a lot about a balanced home/work life, their actions are just the opposite. Continual downsizing and budget cuts require people to do two or three people's workloads. Expense cuts do not allow for manual, redundant work to be mechanized to assist workload. Managers are expected to be on 24-hour call seven days a week.”

“In the past year, our employer has increased our workload by a minimum of 25%. We have received no monetary compensation for this. We have also experienced a 25% reduction in staff. The atmosphere this creates is very predictable – a nightmare. Our organization is underfunded and understaffed, and the negative impacts will be clearly visible to anyone who bothers to look. The effect on the “balance” issue is also clear.”

Workload problems due to unrealistic expectations

“Corporate objectives and expectations continue to increase faster than the resources allocated to support the expected growth. The result is that you must work longer hours to do the same job as the year before. ”

“Changing expectations have driven us to a fast-paced and hectic lifestyle. We have less people to do the same jobs, but jobs have also changed due to technology. We are constantly revving the engine and if not enough oil gets on the pistons, the engine blows up. Business and industry and government need to recognize this and find ways to assist.”

“I work for X in a department that has steadily increased the workplace demands and sent a message to do more with less. We are incredibly under-resourced. We have become cynical about ever getting more resources and there is a sense of hopelessness. Is anyone listening to the employees? We doubt it.”

Workload problems associated with being a manager

“It seems that everything is urgent from more senior levels and it changes every day. Meetings consume so much of the work day that much reading, review, offering comment and input must be done during extra hours, often at home.

More and more, days just seem overwhelming and it is getting worse by the day. As a manager, it is becoming harder and harder to give attention to the management work of coaching, performance assessment, lead planning, etc.”

“This employer states that there is no upward limit to the amount of work they can ask a manager to do. They suppose a manager should work, on average, 55 hours per week. When managers return from extended sick leave – as three have this year – they must be able to handle an unlimited amount of work. There is little support in this corporation for individuals or management teams to help us cope with workload. This is a huge problem for all members of our management team.”

“I manage a group which was cut from 65+ people to 9. Workload has tripled. In the last six months, one employee died, one collapsed, one out on stress (one in fact was out 12 months ago for three months). I am completely overloaded and afraid someone in my group will collapse or take a heart attack.”

Workload problems due to an inability to plan and to set priorities

“I don't want more money, just less work to do, better planning and coordination and less crisis management focused activities.”

“Paralysis by analysis reigns! So every project takes double time – but no overtime.”

“Our employers, supervisors and company executive are unfocused, disorganized and not on the same page, which at times results in a lot of extra work.”

“The organization I work for has multiple goals – often conflicting. Management is extremely poor. With a lack of plans and ineffective implementation, the same problems occur with every change and nothing is learned.”

Workload problems due to the impact of office technology

“E-mail is widely used as the primary method of communication with employees at all levels; however, there is a universal expectation that everyone reads, clears and responds to all e-mails on a daily basis, actually a constant basis. This is unrealistic. Memos sent in late afternoon are expected to be read by morning for discussion. This is unreasonable. Everyone needs to understand that communications need to be managed, time must be allowed to read, understand and be able to respond. We waste time on computers and software because

there is no training program on how to effectively use our applications and networks. This not only wastes time and resources – it also adds to everyone's frustration.”

“Technology has had a major impact on workload. It is not unusual to receive 40 to 50 e-mails per day, most of which require either a response or some actions.”

“The amount of work, regardless of organization, has increased dramatically in the last decade, mainly due to the increased use of technology. With today's technology we can have someone in our office, an incoming phone call, voice mails and e-mails – all of which we are supposed to respond to at once. Technology has added the expectation of immediate response – and solutions – to the workplace.”

Organizational Problems: Non-Supportive Management

Nine percent of all the comments (almost 25% of the comments in the organizational problem category) linked work-life conflict to the behaviour of managers in their organization. Men and employees without children were more likely to perceive their manager as non-supportive. Where do the majority of these types of problems arise? If one uses the relative number of comments as an indicator, the majority of employees (approximately 70%) were frustrated with the behaviour of their immediate manager. The rest (around 33%) felt that upper management was the source of the work-life balance problems they were experiencing within their organization. How do managers make balance more difficult? The comments suggest the following mechanisms:

- Immediate manager does not treat the employee with respect
- Managers do not see their people management role as a priority
- Immediate manager acts as a barrier to the use of supportive policies
- A lack of leadership at the top

Taken together, these comments support the idea that employees often do not leave an organization; rather, they leave bad management.

Immediate manager does not treat the employee with respect

“My manager is the source of much of my stress. He likes to point out your mistakes in front of others. He has no respect for his employees. He puts down his peers in front of his employees. If you take time off for your child's doctor's appointment, you had better make up every minute. His values are not the same as the company's – his actions are different than his words. He has no compassion for his employees or their families.”

“Our director is a dictator! This man has no skills with people. It's all his way or the highway.”

“At times I feel as if I am a child and my manager is my babysitter. I wish to be treated as an adult, respected as an adult who is responsible, and a good worker who will put in my hours as required. When I'm late, I'll give up my breaks. If I'm early, I may take an extra few minutes at lunch. My manager needs to recognize that I'm not out to screw my employer – they are my livelihood.”

“The most stress in the job is caused by my supervisor. She does not support her staff, screams at them, cannot handle any stress, is poor at dealing with people problems and therefore causes many herself. She doesn't listen well and constantly causes confusion because of her poor listening skills.”

Managers do not see their people management role as a priority

“Managers absolutely need to accept their management role as a priority. Work satisfaction depends on effort and organizational support. If leaders don't take time to support their employees by encouraging, discussing and rewarding (positive strokes), then there will be work unbalance. Leadership is critical to balance.”

“The wrong people get placed in management positions and are not carefully enough screened for their people management skills. A lot of the managers have been around since the 1970s and 1980s and haven't realized that times have changed. Most of our managers at all levels need training on how to manage people.”

“I've seen my boss once in the last four weeks, for five seconds.”

Immediate manager acts as a barrier to the use of supportive policies

“Technically speaking, we have flex hours and compressed days – but when we ask for them our manager always uses “operational requirements” as an excuse for turning us down.”

Lack of leadership at the top

“I love my job, but I can't recommend it to anyone. My immediate supervisor is great, but upper management seem basically incompetent to me. Many are interested only in administrative details and self

aggrandizement. Nobody seems concerned with the job, and helping staff is the furthest thing from their minds. It is a rare thing indeed to see anyone at the top walk the talk.”

“Work would be much less stressful if the management were qualified to lead. There is no sense that there is a captain of this ship or that anyone knows which direction we are going.”

“Unfortunately, working for X is like being on a sailing ship in the middle of a great all – encompassing fog. The captain of the ship is up in the crow's nest looking for land, and asking the crew members down on the deck to help find that glimpse of land – and the direction to sail in – rather than allowing them to actually sail the boat. The captain does not know what course or where the boat should be going, nor does he care about keeping the sailboat maintained well enough to sail. On this ship it is very difficult to know the parameters of our work and hence very difficult to balance anything.”

Organizational Problems: Organizational Culture

Eight percent of all comments (fully one in five of those in the organizational problem category) focused on how the culture within the organization (the unwritten rules and exceptions) worked against balance. Men, managers, employees with eldercare responsibilities and those working in the public sector were substantially more likely than respondents in the other groups to express concerns with respect to the organization's culture. What kinds of culture did Canadians talk about? From the comments, we identified the following organizational cultures as problematic:

- Culture of hours
- Disconnected culture: good policies, poor practice, poor role models at the top
- Culture of money: money rather than people is what is important
- Management culture
- Culture of backlash
- Culture of guilt
- Culture based on the myth of “separate worlds” (i.e. work or family)

A better understanding of each of these organizational cultures and how they affect balance can be obtained by reading how Canadians described them.

Culture of hours

“Although my employer has invested a lot of effort in studying the issue of work-family balance and in promoting it, the “work culture” speaks to a different situation. Until the management cadre start to “walk the talk,” the

current situation and its implied expectations will continue (employees are considered “serious” and “good managers” based upon the number of hours they are at the office). Meetings with senior management are often scheduled after the end of a typical day. There is still a tendency to look down on those employees who choose to respect the normal (paid) work day, and leave to take care of family/home responsibilities.”

“Despite the fact that we have no “set hours,” I know I am expected by my manager to be at the office at a certain time and to put in a long day. I also know if I want to be promoted, I will have to put in at least 60 hours of work a week.”

Disconnected culture:
good policies, poor practice,
poor role models at the top

“I feel our organization only pays lip service to its family-friendly policies. There is an unspoken feeling that you are taking advantage if you utilize the policies available, or are not as committed to the organization if you aren't working full-time.”

“My employer offers balanced work/personal policies on paper, but it is often very difficult to take advantage of these policies in reality. Some senior people in the office greatly discourage their use and nothing is done to reprimand these people, despite the fact that their positions on the subject are well known.”

“The people at the very top want the organization to appear to support family values. However, they put such strict production expectations on the organization that the family values are the first to go by the wayside. For these things to work, the values must be supported at the top and that philosophy passed down the line of authority. It is the HR professionals that are the worst offenders.”

“Although our employer claims to be caring, flexible and accommodating of employee needs, the reality is dramatically different. Either our executive is so far detached from their employees' reality that they cannot meet their true needs, or they are merely being hypocritical. Balancing work and family may be a goal of the HR department, but it is clearly not a goal shared by the entire executive.”

“This organization prides itself on supporting its employees. It fails, though, because senior management does not walk the talk, which puts pressure on the rest of the management team. It is generally accepted that to become a member of the executive group you must work at least 12 hours a day. Some of our executives consider this to be work-life balance. I do not!”

Culture of money: money rather than people is what is important

“I don't feel our company is much different than any other in our industry. It is all about money and share price. All the talk is about the importance of balance between work, family and lifestyle, but very little of the actions are.”

“In an age where corporations are run by pleasing shareholders with increasing profits, shares and dividend prices, individual employees will be forced to do more work and work longer hours. All companies streamline, rightsize, or whatever pleasant-sounding name they wish to stick on it. They get rid of employees and get more work out of the ones left behind by having them take on more responsibility and more tasks and work longer hours with no regard for their family life. It's a dog eat dog world more than ever. Surveys may come and go – our company has had several over the years – and from the working man's view nothing changes. The profits must go up and the expenses (often employees) must go down. It's a cruel fact, but it is a fact. The family as it was once known is a dying breed, and people will no longer have time or money to start or have a family. When a company implements a new absence-reporting tracking process and is proud of it, when you are penalized from promotion because you missed a couple of days with the flu, you know they don't really care about you at all.”

“Our work site, while giving the impression of being family-oriented, is becoming less family-friendly. That has changed in the 10 years I have been here. Emphasis is on money saving at all costs. Morale in this work site continues to go lower!”

“The concept of balancing work, family and lifestyle is one that many organizations pay lip service to. The ability to job share, paid days to care for sick children, on-site daycare, etc., are unrealistic expectations in today's economy. The reality is that organizations are continually downsizing and looking for ways to cut costs. Unless there is a monetary incentive in the form of tax credits, there are few organizations that would choose to offer enhanced benefits to employees.”

Management culture

“Our company is progressive and works hard to provide flexible policies. As one moves up in management, the performance expectations are extremely high and this is why we are successful as an organization. Using the flexible policies would be career-limiting in my position. I am female and in a senior position with no back-up. If I need to take time off to balance my personal/work life, my work is piled up when I return, so I end up being in a worse position. Capable individuals, high performers,

are inundated with work and responsibilities, while the lower performers have no problems with work-life balance. I work hard and am responsive to increased work demands, which means I have less personal time. My children pay the price. I often feel trapped by the financial dependence on my job. I am the major wage earner with the major responsibilities at home too. I see that it is much easier for my male colleagues who have stay-at-home wives.”

“In order to become a manager in this organization, one must be prepared to state that you will give up everything for your job. If you don't state that in an interview, you are considered an inappropriate choice for a promotion.”

Culture of backlash

“As an independent, single woman with no children, I am sick and tired of hearing parents go on and on about their children and how hard it is to be a working parent. They should have realized that before they started a family. Having children means sacrifice, but those people – parents – should not expect other co workers to pick up the slack. I cannot count the number of times I have seen co workers leave to go to parent-teacher interviews, ballet practice, Beaver Cubs, etc., during regular working hours. It's maddening. I realize that families are important – mine is certainly important to me – but I don't expect my manager to let me leave during the day because my sister or mother is sick. So why should a co-worker be permitted to leave because their child is sick? It's a double standard.”

“Although companies are talking about implementing work-life balance programs, in reality it seems to take a long time before the programs/policies are rolled out to employees and practised. I have found that when making recommendations or talking about possible programs that may benefit women, men generally don't feel it's necessary. They respond by saying it's not fair that women get extra benefits, but they don't realize there's still some form of gender inequity and glass ceiling that women face in the workplace.”

“I luckily grew up with an old-school way of approaching work: work hard, don't complain, and give loyalty to the company. I also obtained enough education to mould these ideals to the harsh politically correct and liberal work environments that dominate today's corporations. I firmly believe that these environments are breeding generations of employees who are so sensitive to anything that goes on around them that stress leave has become the most convenient way to escape work. Those of us who strive to become educated and control our personal and work lives are quite simply disgusted with the amount of people who the system allows to keep jobs and/or careers and/or positions that others who are qualified can't get! I know – I've been there.”

Culture
of guilt

“Although my manager allows me to take flex days, I always feel guilty about asking. I also feel guilty about leaving at 4:30 to get home, as the person who had my job previously would always stay late.”

“Guilt is a powerful force! Many times I have wished, while my children were growing up and during my work life, that I could have had flexible hours, been able to work at home, and not feel guilty – not feel guilty to take a day off, to simply recharge myself! You worry that if you are sick the other staff will have to do double duty and you worry about what they will think of you. You need to be supported in your decisions and not feel guilty!”

“Although my organization has great supports for balancing family with work, it is often hard to take the time. There seems to be a lot of guilt when you leave work on time. Overtime is often expected.”

Culture based on the
myth of separate worlds
(i.e. work or family)

“The only people who climb this corporate ladder are men, or childless women. X is not family-oriented. There are no days off for sick kids (must use vacation), three days compassionate leave if your spouse dies, and after that they dock your pay. No such thing as mental health day or a family day for unexpected emergencies.”

“Many senior managers don't understand dual commitment to work and family. They are of an age and generation that had different beliefs. They expect work to come first – always and with NO exceptions!”

“This corporation to no extent tries to listen and meet the expectations of the employees working for it. They have made zero effort to provide a schedule that lifts some of the stress and help staff achieve a fulfilling and responsible personal and family life. This fact continues to be the reason for low morale and general unhappiness in the workplace.”

“It is unacceptable for a woman to express the fact that her family is important and may take precedence over work – especially to women who do not have children.”

Organizational Problems: Conflict Between Balance and Career Advancement

Four percent of the comments given by respondents dealt with the conflict employees felt between achieving balance and advancing in their career. According to this group of Canadians, these goals were mutually exclusive because:

- The strategy of putting family ahead of work (even when children are young) hurts career advancement.
- Career development activities often make it more difficult to meet family demands.
- Time crunch negatively affects career advancement.
- Career advancement often depends on relocation, which is difficult to do in families where both partners are working.

Reading the comments below, one is struck by how many Canadians feel that they are in a no-win situation – either advance in their career or have a meaningful life outside of work. It is interesting to note that women were substantially more likely than men to talk about a conflict between balance and career advancement.

Strategy of putting family ahead of work hurts career advancement

“I made the decision when my children were young to put my professional career on hold. Now that my children have grown, the organization has decided that I am too old to spend the effort and time on career development.”

“My colleague who does the same job as me is single with no dependants. She is very competitive and constantly strives to make herself look more valuable to the company than I am. I therefore feel pressured to put in extra time and effort – at the expense of myself and my family – to keep up with her. If I don't do this, I believe I will not get competitive raises and will be at risk of some day losing my job.”

Career development activities often make it more difficult to meet family demands

“In order to advance in my career I need to further my education, which would definitely interfere with the time I have available for my family – which is not enough as it is! Guess I have to stay where I am.”

“Young, single employees or those with no children have a real advantage when it comes to career advancement, as they are able to take advantage of educational opportunities and support. Those with children, especially young

children, have their hands full and are therefore limited in career opportunities/advancements. Coordination of family/work makes furthering education almost impossible.”

Time crunch negatively affects career advancement

“I’ve been advised by my director not to try for an upcoming competition if I’m not willing to put in extra hours of unpaid overtime, even though he feels I’m qualified to do the job.”

“Career advancement requires an inordinate commitment of time, especially in management positions. This even applies to low-level line management/supervisors. This makes balance difficult, if not impossible, if you want any kind of family life.”

“Normal family life with two young kids is more and more demanding; the rat race is competitive and without mercy. Bachelors or DINKs [dual income, no kids] are at an advantage, with more time to work and focus on a job. Since this is what gets you ahead in this company, it makes all the talk about work-life balance a farce.”

Career advancement often depends on relocation, which is difficult to do in families where both partners are working

“My organization continues to think in terms of physical location for work assignments. This limits my development opportunities, as I’m not able to relocate due to my husband’s work/career.”

Organizational Problems: Policies

Three percent of all the comments dealt with the organization’s work-life policies. Respondents noted a wide variety of concerns in this area, including the following:

- Policies are not clear
- There are no policies
- Inequity with respect to the ability to use the policies
- Policy versus practice: a lack of accountability with respect to use of the policies

Canadians also identified concerns with the policies of their organization with respect to flexible hours, telework, overtime work, education, part-time work, leaves in general, parental leave, vacation time, and their organization’s drug plan. Private sector employees were substantially more likely to

see the policies (or lack thereof) in their organization as contributing to their work-life conflict. Organizations seeking to implement supportive policies would be well advised to learn from the experiences described below.

Policies are not clear

“I would like to get something from the company in writing to describe the policy for flextime, personal days, sick days. Employees would be much happier if they were clear on the company's standpoint because they could take needed time off without guilt.”

“I don't know what services are available. Some are available on paper but not in practice. Some organizational supports are purely dependent on one's manager.”

“I believe that in general policies at X are good. Unfortunately, I find that there is a lot of room for interpretation with individual supervisors. Employees generally end up losing the argument, as we have not been informed of our rights with respect to these programs.”

There are no policies

“I see this organization as lagging behind others in that it's very slow and hesitant to adopt things such as a compressed work week and flexible hours. These are some features I will be looking for in another organization.”

“It would be helpful if X offered flex work arrangements, job sharing options or modified work weeks to help employees balance work and family! Right now there is nothing.”

“Job sharing, compressed work weeks, and working at home just don't appear to be options in our area, although they could be with today's technology.”

Inequity with respect to the ability to use the policies

“When work-family programs are applied unevenly and denied to many (as they are in this place), they only serve to further demoralize an already beleaguered workforce.”

“From personal experience and observation, flexibility in the workplace is based on who you are and if management likes/dislikes you.”

“I find the company I work for is a good company – but the department I am in is not. There are so many different departments in this company and the rules are so different from one department to another. For example, time off for doctor's appointments without making it up does not exist in our department, but in another department they get time off for kids' appointments without having to make up time. Part-time hours exist in certain departments, but in our department, no way! Lots of favouritism. This really stresses me out.”

Policy versus practice: a lack of accountability with respect to use of the policies

“The company says the words in our values and vision statement; management does not, however, practise them. Nor does anyone in the organization have responsibility or accountability to ensure that the

policies are put into practice.”

“Our organization has good policies on paper but does not implement or encourage them. Telework approval is hard to get. If you are allowed, you can only telework between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. – you cannot start at 7:00 a.m. Cannot work compressed hours if you are part-time. Cannot work through lunch and breaks to leave early. Seems like our policy is "Cannot".”

Organizational Problems: Too Much Change Makes Balance More Difficult

We are often told by the media and academics that we are in a period of rapid and continuous change. Two percent of all of the comments made by the Canadians who responded to our survey pointed out that organizational change was making their life more stressful and making balance more problematic. Respondents working in the public sector were substantially more likely than other groups of respondents to talk about the stresses associated with change. What is it about change that makes things more difficult? Respondents identified the following factors:

- Organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring and amalgamating increase workloads and work stress
- Too much change overwhelms an employee's ability to cope

A better appreciation of how the organizational changes that are occurring affect Canadians can be gained by reading what they have to say in this regard.

Organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring and amalgamating increase workloads and work stress

“Work is very demanding. The merger has been extremely difficult. Culture clashes. People resigning. Most older experienced employees were bought out, leaving the mid-

level employees to pick up the workload.”

“When I began working for X 10 years ago, it was a good place to work. Since the amalgamation took place, it has taken a turn... Our hours are cut, layoffs have increased, our pays are not consistent.”

“There is presently a great deal of uncertainty due to a large downsizing initiative. There is a huge amount of work to be done to accommodate the changes, and in some cases quite unrealistic deadlines. I am finding it increasingly difficult to cope with this on top of everything else.”

Too much change overwhelms an employee's ability to cope

“These days it's hard to “buy in” to the organization's “new and improved” ideas when two months down the road it's something different and the old idea is not important any more. Creates frustration and stress.”

“The workload changes each year and one is always in a state of change – never being able to use what has been previously used, always having to adapt it. I often feel that we are constantly redesigning the wheel.”

“Constant changes in the workplace – many of which either seem unnecessary or have been arranged by those who are not on the front lines – add stress.”

Organizational Problems: Temporary and Part-time Work

Approximately 2% of all the coded comments dealt with the problems of working part-time or having temporary work. Respondents noted the following concerns:

- Temporary employees do not get the same benefits as those working full-time.
- The insecurity associated with temporary work is very stressful.
- People who hold temporary jobs have less control over their work and non-work lives.
- Canadians who cannot get permanent employment are delaying having families.

Many Canadian organizations are hiring temporary rather than permanent employees. The reality of temporary and part-time work can be discerned from the comments below.

Temporary employees do not get the same benefits as those working full-time

“My current position is temporary. Income is a problem. The company I work for seems to do a good job of considering family for its full-time employees, but many of the programs are not available to a temporary employee.”

“I feel I would have a lot less stress at work if the company would hire me on permanently. I feel after working full-time hours for two years, I deserve to have some job security and permanent benefits – especially since I am paying union dues. I have no medical coverage and barely any eye coverage. I also am not allowed to use flextime because I'm not permanent.”

The insecurity associated with temporary work is very stressful

“Things would be easier to balance if my position was indeterminate. Term positions are hard on the employees and their families. We are always worried – about making ends meet, about what happens when my job is done. Will I be extended? Will I lose everything?”

“I must say, one of the bigger stress problems I see in our workplace is not family or lifestyle – it is job security. I hear it every day here, everywhere. Myself, being a term, always waiting for that extension is more stressful than any family balance. At least at home I have some control and people who respect my requests and needs. At work it is so different. You give your best every day, yet after three years you still wait and wait. That is stress. Can you buy things? Can you afford this? Will you be here tomorrow? That never knowing is so hard on people.”

“I work for X as a temporary employee. I see so many of the employees working hours and hours of overtime, you would think that it would be cheaper to hire more people and pay them at a regular rate. For the temporary employees, we never know if/when we are going to be laid off. It's very stressful waiting with such uncertainty. Hiring more people would save money and reduce stress for employees in the long run.”

People who hold temporary jobs have less control over their work and non-work lives

“Working as a casual employee does not provide a regular work schedule to juggle family commitments around. Short notice is often the norm for casuals. I have cancelled appointments to work and then been told at the last minute I was not needed.”

“My employment is six month seasonal with frequent extensions. These extensions are often decided on the last day of my term, making long term planning (i.e. vacations) more difficult.”

“The position I hold is a seasonal one. The largest degree of stress is brought about from lack of knowledge of future scheduling ... or even what the next day might bring.”

“We are in a constant state of limbo because our jobs are both contract positions. My spouse gets recontracted each year – for over 10 years now. I have a full-time and a part-time job – both contracts. We have no benefits and no certainty of renewal.”

Canadians who cannot get permanent employment are delaying having families

“Contractual employees do not have their contracts renewed if they get pregnant. This means that I cannot start a family until I can get permanent work – but that is easier said than done!”

“I think it is important to note that with the advent of contract work being so prevalent, the stability of even having a family or buying a house becomes an overwhelming commitment. Therefore, many people like myself are delaying family life until later in life.”

“I was hired and am currently working on a contract-to-contract basis. Because of this, I am hesitant to get married and have children. The day I know that I will have stable employment I will be starting the process for a family. Until that time, I cannot and will not, for fear of not being able to support them.”

“Difficult to start a family when the job is temporary. Being on contract means I do not have the job security to facilitate re entry to the workforce after maternity leave. This is a big concern. I would like to start a family but need to work to balance competing financial priorities (i.e. student loans, car, rent).”

Organizational Problems: Work-Related Travel Increases Stress

One percent of all the comments linked the need to travel for work to greater work-life conflict. The dimensions of this issue are illustrated by the comments below.

Work-related travel increases stress

“The requirement to travel with work is probably the source of the most stress in my life. It cuts into personal time and social activities or obligations, school meetings, sports activities of my son, etc., and requires me to make alternate childcare arrangements – a huge hassle.”

“When I have to travel I get stressed. When I travel I work long days in stressful situations. When I get home I'm tired and burned out – not relaxed. Usually the house is not up to my standards and my family misses me, yet I am too tired to cope and feel incredible guilt. I minimize travel sometimes at the expense of my career.”

“I have to travel away frequently overnight, and must have live in childcare. Although my household duties are taken care of by this person (i.e. housekeeping, laundry), having an additional person living in our home is an additional stress. My spouse is becoming increasingly resentful of my travel and the impact it has on him. Consequently, I have considered changing positions.”

Organizational Problems: Specific Challenges

A number of Canadians (3% of all those who gave comments) talked about stresses that were particular to their particular work situation and that spilled over into their home environment. We considered several of these to be worthy of note, including:

- Challenges facing the baby boomers
- Stresses associated with teaching
- Stresses associated with nursing

The comments with respect to teaching and nursing, two professions that have been under siege over the past decade, illustrate how deteriorating work conditions and environments can affect one's life outside of work. The comments with respect to challenges facing the baby boomers have relevance because of the high percentage of the Canadian population within this demographic group.

It should be noted that women and those working in the not-for-profit sector were substantially more likely to make comments that were grouped into this category. This is not surprising, given the fact that both hospitals and schools were included in the not-for-profit sector sample.

Challenges facing the baby boomers

“It is interesting that when the children leave the nest the unwritten company expectation is you can devote more time to the job. This is just at the point where one needs to spend more time caring for parents and re establishing the relationship with one's spouse. To a 50-something, it is an added pressure to try and keep up with the effort and hours worked by the younger members. Working smart helps, but the optics are always there that you don't put in the same effort as the younger members. Fear of termination and reduced ability to find employment are a constant concern.”

“A number of years ago, the indicators showed people going to a shorter work week. In fact, we've gone to a longer week, more hours at the same pay. I repeatedly request unpaid time off to spend more time for myself and my family. It is almost always denied because of “workload.” Companies have cut staff so drastically, and offered retirement incentives to the ones with the right numbers, that my category – the end of the boomers – is left with a much heavier workload. We are middle-aged and tired.”

“There is no concession given to the aging worker. At 50 years of age, he/she may not be able to physically do the job as quickly as before, but there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise which can be used in possibly a “different” way. Instead, all workers are treated equally and expected to do the same type of work and on all the different shifts (days, evenings, nights). I feel this leads to the premature exodus of women/men from eldercare. If management wants to prevent a shortage of experienced workers, they need to address this issue.”

Stresses associated with teaching

“Teaching is a career that encompasses the whole life of an individual. There are no set hours of work because education is ongoing at school and at home with family.

Every moment contributes to learning. My spirit is still very high and I believe I have chosen the best profession; however, government and political interference have created a very tired, weary, stressed and frustrated group of educators, which impacts not only on one's personal family life, but also on the lives of each student in the classroom.”

“I don't think people realize how stressful teaching is. It's a very demanding job, with very little job satisfaction – parents treat us like babysitters. It's sad how people view us. It's annoying to hear people talking badly about teachers.”

“At this point in the political climate, I try to avoid admitting I am a teacher! I used to put my heart and soul into my teaching career. I even chose not to have a family because of the demands on my time outside of school. Now I am told by media that I am basically worthless! I would not recommend a teaching career for anybody at this point. I used to love teaching even though I had little time for myself. Now teaching is a job to pay the bills – acceptable but not loved.”

Stresses associated with nursing

“The type of work I do (nursing) can be very demanding and physically, emotionally and spiritually draining. Taking care of the elderly means we have all types of

physical, mental and emotional needs to meet. This does affect my home life because I become emotionally drained. Last year we were so understaffed and overworked it was very hard. I had more trips to the chiropractor due to the physical strain on my body from bed-care patients and heavy workload.”

“I feel that nurses are under increasing pressure related to the cutbacks in health care. While most patients treat us with respect and appreciate our service, some do not and these incidents are hard to forget. These patients are rude and abusive at times. My feeling is that most nurses don't report these problems and take these issues home with them, creating stress and lack of job satisfaction.”

“There is a real perception that our work is not valued or appreciated by our employer. Constant cutbacks make it almost impossible to do a good job and thus contribute to job-related stress. This is compounded for me by personal, family-related stress to the point where it is affecting my physical and emotional health. Our employer chooses to deny that these negative effects can be changed by management attitudes or decisions.”

Organizational Problems: Comments that Say It All

“Let me describe where I work, and then you tell me why I have a problem with balance. 1. My employer's demands are unrealistic. 2. My employer couldn't care less about people, only the work and getting it done. 3. My work requires a lot of extra hours, but this is never repaid in time off when needed for outside appointments or personal or family matters, be it a doctor/dentist or other matter. 4. My employer is very selfish; they expect you to meet totally unrealistic objectives, work extra hours with no compensation of any kind. 5. My employer has the attitude that you are lucky to be employed with such a great company and you are not to rock the boat, no matter what. 6. My employer demands and expects hard work, long hours and no expectations other than your paycheque. 7. My employer does not reward loyalty, hard work, dedication, commitment to the job or extra hours worked. 8. My employer repays speaking up for yourself or others with a label – blacklisted – no future career – or forces you out of employment....”

“If my organization had enough staff. If the staff in the X department didn't hate their jobs, they probably wouldn't have such a high turnover rate. If we didn't have to work a Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday shift. If managers would stay in a department for more than three months. If one person wasn't expected to do the work of two people. If overtime wasn't expected. If safety was the primary concern. If vacation wasn't a problem. If general morale wasn't low. If hiring new technicians didn't take six months. If hiring new managers didn't take 12 months. If we had suitable working conditions, i.e. space. If our union had a backbone. If I didn't have to work holidays.”

Problems and Challenges at the Work-Life Interface

In the research literature it is generally recognized that work-life conflict manifests itself in a number of different ways. For some it is role overload – having too much to do in the time available. For others it is having a job that interferes with the performance of family roles and responsibilities or having too little time for oneself. The reverse also occurs: some employees find that their role as a parent or spouse makes it difficult for them to be the kind of employee they want to be.

Approximately 12% of the comments related to problems or challenges Canadians faced in balancing competing demands and expectations. In other words, these comments dealt with both their situation at work and their situation at home. Women, and employees in the not-for-profit sector were substantially more likely to make comments about challenges they had with respect to managing the interface between work and home. Analysis of the comments suggested that for Canadian employees problems at the work-life interface can be associated with any or all of the following:

- Role overload
- Interference between work and family roles
- Challenges associated with specific family circumstances

Comments with respect to each of these aspects are given below, followed by a number of general comments about balance that are noteworthy because they articulate what balance is (or is not).

Problems at the Work-Life Interface: Role Overload

Role overload is defined as having too much to do in the amount of time available. In 1991, 42% of employed Canadians reported high levels of role overload. This had increased to 56% by 2001. Three percent of the comments related to role overload. These were divided into two categories:

- Emotional or physical fatigue
- Having too much to do for the time available (feeling time-crunched)

Respondents in the not-for-profit sector were substantially more likely than those in other groups to make comments that were classified as role overload. What does role overload feel like? The comments below give some indication.

Emotional or
physical fatigue

“Approaching mid-life I find the pressure of home and work very difficult. I always believed I could manage both a rewarding career and be a wonderful mother and I worked very, very hard to that end. Now I find myself very tired and burned out and very disappointed with the cost of getting there. It's not as glamorous and wonderful as I had dreamed. My ability to cope on my own strength has gone. I am trying to get help through a professional and am not having great luck.”

“For me the biggest challenge of trying to achieve a balance is the fatigue I feel constantly and the job stress I take home with me. This impacts on my relationship with my spouse, and the energy I have for my children. There is always a feeling of guilt. When you are at work, you feel guilty for not being with your children. When family obligations take you from work, you feel stressed about what you are missing and the additional work needed to catch up.”

Having too much to do for the time available (feeling time-crunched)

“Life is a constant run from task to task.”

“I think most of the stress comes from trying to do everything and still be a good parent, partner, daughter, sister and friend. It's mostly my own fault. Life is simply too fast-paced. The demands to put your children in sports, do well in school, keep entertained, combined with working full time and a spouse working shift work, make me feel I'm on a high-speed train. I wish it would slow down, yet I know I'm doing what everyone else does all the time. It's just how life is today. None of us – or very few – have the guts to change it, to try to slow down, try a new approach – because we're too busy keeping up with everyone else. We all want things, or think we do, and get caught up in the rat race, yet I think a lot of us wish we weren't this way and recognize that nobody can change it but us.”

“Time is always an issue. I feel I am always rushing from one thing to the next. My husband and I are both working full-time and raising three children, and it seems we never get a break. I find I have to be super-organized so I can feel good at work and home.”

“Time is so tight. It seems wherever I am I should really be somewhere else. Everything is such a rush.”

Problems at the Work-Life Interface: Role Interference

Role interference is defined as the stress one feels when one is forced to choose between competing roles – to satisfy the expectations of one role at the expense of another. It occurs because it is physically impossible for someone to be in two different places doing two different things at exactly the same time. People have to make choices. Work-family role interference can take two forms, depending on which role – work or life – is given precedence. Work interference with family and life occurs when employees give preference to their work role at the expense of time or energy for their family or themselves. Family to work interference, on the other hand, occurs when personal or family demands and responsibilities are met at the expense of work. Work interference with family is far more prevalent

in Canada than is family interference with work. In 2001, one in 10 employed Canadians reported high levels of family to work interference, while almost one in three reported high work interference with family.

Six percent of the comments at the end of the survey related to role interference. These were divided into five groupings:

- Work interferes with family
- Children and family interfere with work and career
- Work and family interfere with time for self
- Housework interferes with time for self and family
- The commute to and from work interferes with time for self and family

There were no differences among the groups of respondents with respect to all but one of the types of interference noted above. Women were more likely than men to express frustrations related to housework.

Work interferes with family

“I hate the notion that people with family responsibilities need more concessions from work than single people, and yet expect to and need to get paid the same. I hate needing concessions. I hate that I shortchange my partner and family because I’m depleted by working, yet here I am at work on a holiday, after a doctor’s appointment.”

“I find it difficult to balance family and work. I always wanted children and I love mine deeply. I wish I could spend more time with my boys. They’re growing up so fast and I’m missing out on a lot of their changes. I have to work, though, to make ends meet.”

“Most days it is a struggle to get through. I do not like bringing my problems home. I don’t like getting mad at my wife or kids for things they do which are normal. I’m tired of being angry. My job creates this environment. I wish I could control my life more like the way I envision it. I wish I could have more time with my kids, doing things like other parents do.”

Children and family interfere with work and career

“My husband works in the same company and by filling out this survey, the light went on. He was filling out the section about time spent by him and by his spouse on work and household and childcare. He said, “I realized I’m not doing my share,” words I never thought I’d hear. The majority of men really

don't know how much their spouses do to keep children and household operating. Studies like this may make a difference. Due to this factor of not knowing, women have to make choices and sometimes they make the choice not to move up because they just can't do any more.”

“If I'm not at work, I'm at home or in a grocery store. Often I'm interrupted with calls from home with something as minor as a squabble, which is very distracting. It's a small dilemma from my perception, but a much larger one from the child's perspective and demands my full attention, so I must be flexible enough to at any time be able to juggle personal and professional dilemmas at the same time on no notice. As well, I get phone calls from school and daycare centres that require an emergency number to contact me and use it for anything that comes up. If the kids' grades are low, it's my fault. If I'm late for work, it's my fault. If the house is dirty, it's partly my fault. Sometimes I snap, but I'm allowed.”

Work and family interfere with time for self

“I find the area of my life that is impacted the most by the pressures of work and family is my own free time. My family is my first priority, followed by my work responsibilities, which leaves no time for my own physical/spiritual/emotional well-being. I have no time for reading a book, getting some exercise, having a hobby, etc. It makes it difficult to stay healthy when you ignore this. Although I am still young now, I feel my future health is at risk because I largely ignore this.”

“I have enough demands at home and work to work full-time at both, but try to balance between the two. I feel that I can never do either as well as I could if I gave up one or the other. Since I can't do that, I give up personal time to balance. I feel I have no extra time to deal with occasional situations that crop up and they, therefore, are like a crisis because of lack of time.”

“I really enjoy my job and would love to further my career. As a mother of young children, there is a lot of conflict associated with working outside the home. With that in mind, I always feel that my personal needs are put on the back burner and that I have to be all things to my children and husband. The end result always seems to be a lot of guilt and conflict within myself.”

Housework interferes with time for self and family

“I find it very difficult, as I am always feeling so tired from my work. I get upset because my house is not as clean as I would like it to be, but I cannot physically do it all by myself. Family helps out a little, but my husband also works long

hours and my children are very busy with school and personal life. I hope for the day when I can work a four-day week and have one day for housework and two days for family and personal, time. Now I feel I try to squeeze too much into two days and never feel completely rested.”

“Working part-time and being female means I do all the following: laundry, meals, housework, childcare, shopping, and yard work. Yet I still have to go to work, do a good job, meet my own job demands. I'm still expected to be supportive of my spouse, whose excuse is “I work full-time.” I feel like I'm forced to be super mom.”

The commute to and from work interferes with time for self and family

“My husband and I both make good incomes, but we still struggle week to week due to the cost of childcare and commuting expenses. Both parents commute approximately one hour to and from work, which adds time to the work day and the time we require childcare. Our whole lives revolve around going to work and caring for two small children. This leaves little time for anything else.”

“Having to commute two hours a day to and from work is really tiring. Less family time; by the time I get home and have supper, it's time to go to bed, get up and start over again.”

Problems at the Work-Life Interface: Specific Challenges

A number of Canadians (3% of all those who gave comments) talked about stresses associated with their particular family situation that had made work-life balance very difficult to achieve. We considered several of these to be worthy of note, including:

- Challenges associated with being a single parent
- Challenges associated with living with a workaholic

Women were more likely than men to say they found being a single parent or living with a workaholic difficult. This is consistent with national data indicating that women are more likely than men to head a single-parent household. The strain these women are under is illustrated by the comments below.

Challenges associated with being a single parent

“As a single mother, it is very challenging to raise two children and manage a home life and a full-time job. I cannot afford, on one salary, to take a vacation away from

home, and I have to pay for summer camp, which is \$2,070 per year, as well as daycare during the school year. My daycare closes at 5:30 and I finish work at 5:00. There is no flexibility for me to finish earlier. I love my job and the people I work with – what is tough is the before and after.”

“As a single parent, I have a very hard time balancing one full-time job and one part-time job, just to try to make ends meet! I have a hard time trying to fit in time for my child and time for me. I want to be everything, but I can't. I dream of a day when I can work only one job and actually see my child more than an hour or two a day. I work at least six, usually seven, days a week. I am super-stressed and see no way out anytime soon.”

“I am a single mother of two. I work 7:30 to 4:00, Monday to Friday. I feel very tired and irritable every day. Wish I had more time for physical exercise and family time. My children are young and I feel guilty for not spending enough time with them.”

“I have just recently become divorced, and am solely responsible for providing support to my three children. I tend to be stressed due to this rather than work issues. Work is a picnic and a nice stable place to be at!”

Challenges associated with living with a workaholic

“My husband is a graduate student who has also started his own consulting business. Currently he works an 80-hour week, which makes it difficult for him to balance work and home. I try to pick up a lot of the household duties, which makes it hard for me to balance.”

“I have a two-hour commute to work each day, two preschoolers to take to daycare 40 minutes from home, 15 minutes from work. My day starts at 4:30 a.m. and ends at 9:00 p.m., bedtime. My husband works 60-70 hours per week, so I feel like a single parent most of the time. I can't expect him to do more – that's two full-time jobs. We need both incomes to carry the mortgage, car payments, etc. We have no luxuries and no extras, but hope to have our home paid off in 15 years.”

Problems at the Work-Life Interface: Comments that Say It All

“The major concern I have with work/family/lifestyle is the fact that there is too much work and not enough people power. The amount of work has increased, but no new staff was hired. When it comes to family time, I don't see my family until 5:00 p.m. That's when I make dinner, clean up, make lunches

for the next day. Then it's time to do homework with my children and have some fun time. They go to bed at 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. Then it's time for me to do my homework. Basically, I need more time in the day. Less work would be nice. You never feel a sense of satisfaction any more.”

“I am a single parent of two adopted children. Job increasingly impinging upon family life. Fine line between the balance of work and family, and work is constantly tipping the balance over, leading to increased stress, lack of time for pleasure. Work hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., no coffee, a half-hour lunch, but lots of unpaid work done in the evening and in the morning prior to official hours. Rush children off to bed because I know I have two or three hours of paperwork and phone calls to do for work. Impatient with children when I know I have a lot of work still to do at night. Expected to be dedicated and work late to meet clients' needs, but what about my children's needs?”

“With today's ever-changing lifestyle, balancing work and family can be quite difficult, tiring and, more times than not, unattainable. One-parent families are increasing, partly due to males (mostly) trying to make it up the corporate ladder – for the benefit of the family – leaving the wife (mostly) to assume all the family and home responsibilities plus work. Women do get burnt out. Many problems of today's youth come from parents, mainly mothers, not being at home during peak times. Inflation is at its peak – therefore everyone in the household has to work in order to barely meet financial responsibilities, and that's just the basics, house, car, food. I think of how work and family are so busy now. I always wonder how much more it will be when my kids are parents. When does a person reach their saturation point of everybody wanting everything now?”

Problems and Challenges at the Individual or Family Level

Just over 10% of the respondents to the Health Canada survey reported high levels of family to work interference. In other words, their personal circumstances, their family and/or their responsibilities outside of work were making it more difficult for them to be the kind of employee they wanted to be. Approximately 11% of the comments made at the end of the survey also dealt with family to work interference. What factors at the personal or family level make balance more difficult? The Canadians who gave comments identified the following factors:

- Personal problems
- Challenges at home
- Eldercare
- Financial strains

Details on each of these factors are given below.

Problems at the Individual or Family Level: Personal Problems

Approximately 3% of Canadians talked about personal events that had made it more difficult for them at work. These events included:

- Death of a spouse or family member

- Divorce or separation
- Change in residence – lack of support in community
- Personal or mental health problems
- Serious physical disorders

The nature of each of these challenges can be determined by reading the quotes below.

Death of a spouse
or family member

“When your spouse passes away, it takes a while to reorganize your life.”

“I am a recent widow – just a year now. I try to stay upbeat, but grief is a tad depressing at times.”

“It has been very hard for our entire family. Our only son died in July, and coping has been very difficult.”

“During the last three years I have lost three members of my natural family and feel rather stressed from this experience. It has helped to make my decision to retire this month and take time to spend with my family.”

“I recently lost my mother. This loss has meant more time, less stress, but more sadness.”

Divorce or
separation

“Going through a marital separation has been my biggest life challenge.

It's extremely difficult to do a great job at work while managing the home and child. Stress is heightened when the separation becomes a financial fight, complete with emotional and mental games by my ex. I have made use of our employee assistance program, my medical doctor, a psychologist, and am blessed with the aid and advice of my family and close friends.”

“It is only after four years of being in a management position that I have finally learned to balance off family and work! Unfortunately, it has come at a price. My husband and I are soon to be separated. He always had a career that was more important than family. It's not that he didn't want a family, just that the only time life was good for him was when his career went well. Until eight years ago, I always worked part-time so that I could care for the children and home. Eight years ago, I embarked on a career, once the children were in school full-time. I quickly advanced to management. For a period of time I was on my own with the children, as my husband travelled extensively for

work. This resulted in burnout. I quit my job to stay at home for nine months. I did return to work, but with a commitment to balance career/home. Through focusing on this commitment and a very supportive company, I have been able to achieve this. While my husband and I are separating, we do believe that we have learned what it takes to balance work/family.”

“Currently I am at a major crossroads in my life and it seems to be a multilane intersection, as I make decisions about marriage failure and early retirement all at the same time!”

Change in residence –
lack of support in
community

“I have lived in this community for four years but have not found it welcoming to newcomers. I also work in an environment where everyone is either twice my age, married and/or have children and therefore do not have the same interests or priorities as me. My family and friends all live several hours away and do not visit often. Sometimes trying to develop a social network and fit into a community can be difficult, discouraging and tiring. Having no family, friends or support immediately available to you is difficult, especially when some of your attempts to improve or change the situation have been ineffective.”

“It can be hard to raise a family when you have no relatives of any kind in the same city. It would be nice to have family around to feel less isolated. The amount of time spent at work and family-related activities doesn't leave much time to develop friendships.”

Personal or mental
health problems

“I'm struggling with some personal circumstances which I feel have left me depressed and low on energy, which in turn makes it difficult to meet work, family and lifestyle needs, let alone balance them.”

“I think I should clarify that if I had a preference I would not be working anywhere as a paid employee. The main interference for me is the fact that I cannot financially manage to support my family without creating a shortfall in the emotional and spiritual department. I cry myself to sleep worrying about lasting effects on my children. I continually feel I am on a roller-coaster ride of unlimited length. It is like one foot is nailed to the floor and I can't do anything but go in circles. I often consider ending it all – but my worry for my children's welfare stops me. I would endure anything to protect them.”

Serious physical disorders

“I am a disabled employee who has a chronic illness called fibromyalgia. It's very difficult to hold a job when you're suffering from chronic fatigue and high pain levels. I am very lucky to be employed and not on pension. I have wonderful co-workers. Because of my mental toughness, I may even make it to retirement in spite of my illness. I just wish I could have work-at-home privileges.”

“Due to a chronic illness, I find it more and more difficult to keep a normal lifestyle. Previously injured at work. Now limited in amount of activity I can perform at work and at home. Compensation is not there to help injured workers – only to harass them constantly.”

Personal and Family Problems: Challenges at Home

Six percent of the respondents gave comments about how circumstances at home had challenged their ability to balance. These comments help us understand the other side of the equation: how family demands can be the source of work-life conflict. The family circumstances that Canadians identified as being problematic included the following:

- Parenting:
 - Preschoolers
 - School-age children
 - Teenagers
 - University children
 - Child with special needs
 - Responsibility for adult children and grandchildren
 - Blended families
- Not being able to stay home with children because money is tight
- Lack of support for the traditional family
- Responsibility for both child and eldercare (sandwich generation)
- Primary responsibility for family
- Lack of time for self
- Dealing with illness within the family
- Caring for a disabled dependant
- Family responsibilities overwhelming ability to cope

A number of the respondents talked about how having children had made it more difficult to achieve balance (4% of all comments related to the challenges associated with parenting). Does balance become easier as children get older? Included within the overall “parenting” category were comments with respect to parenting preschoolers, school-aged children, teenagers, university-aged children, adult children, children with special needs and blended families. These comments suggest that while the types of challenges facing a parent may vary as the children get older, simply being a parent makes balance more problematic.

Not surprisingly, these types of comments were not equally distributed throughout the sample. Women and respondents with children were more likely to talk about how parenting had made balance more problematic. Respondents in clerical and administrative jobs were more likely to express frustrations because they were not able to stay home and care for their children due to their family's financial situation.

The ways in which family circumstances affect Canadians' ability to balance are illustrated by the comments given below.

Parenting:
preschoolers

“Our family will be better off once our kids are in school full time. Right now we make too much for government subsidies, but 90% of every single cheque (of mine) goes to childcare for our kids.”

“Balancing work, family and lifestyle is a difficult task when children are young. Childcare is a huge expense – \$1,000 per month – which affects families from pay to pay. This places a huge strain on the family finances and the ability to have any disposable income. This in turn affects the lifestyle of employees.”

Parenting:
school-age
children

“Now that my children are older, I am under increasing pressure to work later – but I find that my children need me at home just as much. It is hard to find childcare, as there is a cut off age of the 11th birthday for before and after school programs. School start and end times bear no relation to the reality of working parents' hours.”

“The thing that wears me out is acting as a chauffeur to get children to all the activities they do to enrich their lives – dance, drama, music, hockey, various levels of Girl Guides, Beavers...”

Parenting:
teenagers

“With three teenage kids there are days when I'm counting till when they'll be gone! Teenagers put one through a great deal of stress!”

“I worked part-time when my children were young. I did not realize teenagers are just as demanding, if not more. I sometimes think that I should have worked full-time when they were young and part-time now instead of the other way around. Of course, part-time now may not make much of a difference except for being home when they arrive from school and having more energy to deal with teenage life.”

“It is difficult to get teens to start making dinner – I’m seldom home before 7:00 p.m. Plus, my teenagers want to share my car – I’m stranded in the evenings routinely.”

“I live with a teenager. There is no hope for any kind of balance in our lives at this time.”

Parenting:
university
children

“Having four children in university, CEGEP, has left us financially very challenged all of a sudden!”

“Education for my children is the biggest priority right now, and resources are limited with one in college and two ready to enter college soon. Three children going to post-secondary school is going to be stressful.”

Parenting:
child with
special needs

“Our son has special needs, which is the highest contributor to my stress level. He is aggressive – has temper rages – and we are often called to pick him up at school. Our meetings at his school are frequent.”

“With a chronic condition in one child, all I can do is survive. I am tired all the time. We must have my income to survive. I hope things will improve with time. I find my boss very supportive.”

“It’s more difficult to balance when you have a disabled child. Childcare is rarely available for a child in a wheelchair.”

Parenting: responsibility
for adult children and
grandchildren

“I have frequent ongoing responsibilities related to my children and grandchildren because of single parenting (theirs). These responsibilities involve time, energy and financial commitment and complicate balancing work

and family. I have been through eldercare years ago, and now have been supporting younger care for 15 years. Surely I'm not the only one with kids who are single parents, unemployed, struggling and poverty-stricken?"

"Grown children cause stresses for parents too: the cost of their education, their losing their jobs and their spouses, and coming back home to live."

Parenting:
blended families

"I have three part-time stepchildren, so any questions related to children pertain to them. We have them every second weekend and one day during the week in between. We sometimes see them besides that at the boy's hockey games. We've been having custody problems with his ex-wife. My job is boring, but my personal life can be very stressful, so sometimes I appreciate the boredom."

"It is important to note that as a stepmom, some of the day-to-day demands are less but the emotional stress is often much higher when you are trying to coordinate/plan between two different families."

Not being able to stay home
with children because money
is tight

"If I could afford it I would stay home and make my daughters my full time job. Unfortunately, we cannot afford this luxury."

"I work because I need the money. If I had more money I would not work – I would have more children."

"I find that working full-time makes it impossible to balance family times and lifestyle. I never planned on being 42 and working full-time and being a mother. My dream was to be a stay-at-home mom."

"I just came back to work after three years off. I took the leave because of my children. I would have stayed home, but my husband was physically killing himself to make ends meet on the one income. I really enjoyed being home raising my own children, but I felt that I had to choose between being home raising my own children or being a single parent because my husband had to work all the time."

Lack of support for the traditional family

“The biggest hindrance to our lifestyle is the taxes taken from my single income. Our lifestyle is very much a day-to-day struggle to maintain the bills. The price of my wife working outside the home, however, could never outweigh the importance of having someone always there to provide for our children's needs. When I am home, we are both actively involved in child raising. One crucial factor is that both my wife and I choose not to become involved with outside distractions. Unfortunately, our lifestyle choice is one that is constantly under attack, from the lack of governmental support – children no longer figure as deductions in the tax scheme – to the barrage of non traditional family lifestyles that are promoted and supported in the media and through governmental programs. Our choice for the division of labour in our family has become one that has fallen under a sense of reverse discrimination. The incredible amount of support for all other lifestyles and divisions of labour and the deafening silence over support for single-income families is frustrating.”

“My wife and I made a conscious decision when we were married that one of us would work exclusively on the much underrated and unappreciated job of raising our children, and for this extravagance I must pay by holding two full-time jobs. It is the lot I have chosen.”

Responsibility for both child and eldercare (sandwich generation)

“The sandwich generation is a difficult place to be sometimes. It is a daily challenge. I wish I didn't have to work and could have more time for family responsibilities, but I know we couldn't afford it – and also I really do like my job!”

“It has been extremely challenging over the past few years balancing the needs of aging in laws (89 and 90), and two young children (almost two and four years). I feel I know what sandwich generation really means – less sleep and no personal time. I know that I need to make some changes, but at times it feels difficult to organize the change, plan what will work, and implement it.”

Primary responsibility for family

“As a full-time employee plus mother of three young children – three, six and eight years – it is very difficult/fatiguing to deal with all the demands of work and home. Having no family here and mostly working friends with families of their own, it is difficult to get

personal time or couple time. Plus, delegating to and communicating with a partner who does not want to negotiate or compromise makes for added responsibilities.”

“If not for my wife, I could not have family and work balanced. Unfortunately, the stress and concern this puts on her is causing her great difficulty.”

“You should have asked about men helping in the home. Women like me have more than enough to do with full-time work, childcare and household responsibilities. However, men have not reciprocated by moving in to help with family or home-based needs. If family life is to be supported in Canada, housewives need more help – men have got to help at home more.”

Lack of time for self

“Family responsibilities still fall primarily to the woman – balance and pace seem to be difficult to manage. This leaves limited time for personal activities like taking care of self.”

“Unrealistic expectations from all sides. Super mom is a joke. Take time for me – not happening for a million different reasons.”

“The only thing I am unhappy about is the amount of personal time I have, but what can you expect with three young children!”

Dealing with illness within the family

“From personal experience, a life-threatening illness such as cancer in a family member (spouse in my case) puts a new perspective on balancing work, family and lifestyle. Having supportive friends has made it much easier to cope, but it certainly changes your priorities and outlook on life.”

“I have a chronically ill child – cancer. Why is it that I can get one year off (parental leave) when a child is born, but I cannot get any time off for a terminally ill child? Please ask this question to all companies in your survey and our government.”

Caring for a disabled dependant

“My husband is disabled and is very difficult to cope with, as he cannot accept the fact that he can't work any longer and has become very possessive of my time not at work. I feel I have no life now

outside of my job, and stress keeps me from sleeping properly. I have two parents and one in law with severe health problems and I am constantly travelling to help them.”

“My partner is elderly and in deteriorating health with a very small pension. He has no relatives. My family is far away and we are not close. Our well being is almost entirely on my shoulders. At my age, my organization is not willing to invest in me. My director would be delighted if I retired, but I can't afford to.”

“I felt that with hard work and careful planning, retirement would be possible by age 55. But situations change that you can't control. My husband is currently disabled from an accident at work and having difficulty – mentally and physically – finding an alternate job. Support for retraining opportunities for middle-aged people is very poor.”

Family responsibilities
overwhelming ability to
cope

“I can hardly wait for retirement so I can have some free time to take care of my ailing parents. They need me and I have nothing left at the end of the day. I have to work to help my husband recover from bankruptcy. We haven't had a vacation for 13 years. We are trying to put our youngest son through university – he works two jobs in the summer and one while at school. My husband is also recovering from a heart attack last February and major leg surgery this fall.”

“We were coping satisfactorily until my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. As the only child, I am obligated to look after her and had to move her to our city from another country. Her health has been more stable this year but fluctuates a lot. I have used up all my time off. I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia 17 months ago. It saps my energy and I live with chronic fatigue and chronic pain. My youngest adopted child is mentally as well as physically disabled. She is on medication to moderate her depression. I lost my regular job last summer. I now work part-time but have exhausted all my sick leave. It is very hard financially because of debt, and I can't afford to hire help like housecleaning which would lighten the load. My current job has little future and greatly underutilizes my knowledge, skills and abilities. My family responsibilities have impacted my health and career.”

Personal and Family Problems: Eldercare

Only 1% of the comments dealt with how eldercare responsibilities had made balance more difficult. The mechanisms through which eldercare can contribute to imbalance include:

- Responsibility for the care of an elderly dependant
- Financial responsibility for an elderly dependant
- Lack of support for elderly dependants

The comments suggest that each of these situations contributes to imbalance in a slightly different way. In particular, it is interesting to note that it is not only those employees who have their elderly relatives living with them who experience high levels of conflict. Employees with elderly dependants living nearby or elsewhere also experience stress, although the causes seem somewhat different.

Respondents in the public sector sample and those with elderly dependants were substantially more likely than any other group of respondents to make comments that related to problems with eldercare. There were no other group differences with respect to this set of comments.

Given the projections indicating that the percentage of Canadian employees with eldercare responsibilities will increase in the next decade with the aging of the baby boomer cohort, it is important for Canadian governments and employers to understand more fully how eldercare responsibilities affect workers. The comments below are useful in this regard.

Responsibility for the care of an elderly dependant – who lives with employee

“I depend on home care to come to my house and help care for my mother so I can go to work. The home care in my province is terrible. I missed over 600 hours of work in 1999 and three months in 2000. My father, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, lived with us for six and a half months while we tried to get care for him. Then life was an absolute nightmare – trying to juggle caring for him with working. Most times I was too worn out to work but needed to go there to get a break from home.”

Responsibility for the care of an elderly dependant – who lives nearby

“At the present time, my mother-in-law is in the hospital. She has cancer and for the last four years she has had numerous operations. We are now doing round-the-clock care. Fortunately, due to our jobs and the hours we work and the hospital being in close proximity to our home and workplaces, we are able to coordinate this. Lack of sleep at present is the major issue for our family. Due to my age – I also have responsibilities for elderly parents and an aunt – it can be difficult to juggle work and personal responsibilities.”

“I go to an old folks' home at suppertime four to five times a week to feed an invalid mother, as well as working part-time and taking care of a home, a husband and a son who still lives at home. My own time is very limited.”

Responsibility for the care of an elderly dependant – who lives elsewhere

“This year was especially stressful because my elderly mother, who lives in another province, took ill. I found that, at times, I was not able to take time off when required in order to assist her (mainly because of work requirements).”

“The concerns I have about the health and happiness of my elderly parents are tremendous – on par with dealing with small children living in my home. Particularly devastating is the deteriorating health of my parents, who are far away. I feel guilty about not being there.”

“My biggest stress is that my elderly parents live on the other side of the country. I am not always able to be there when they need my help.”

Financial responsibility for an elderly dependant

“I have to assist my mother-in-law financially, which limits our ability to save in order to buy a house.”

“My parents are only in their fifties. However, in the last three years - since we had our son – my mother – formerly a bank manager – lost her job. My father – formerly in auto-body – had to quit because of his health. WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] has denied his claim of work-related illness. They have lost everything, so I pay them what I can to take care of our son for three days and two nights a week while I work a condensed week. I drive over 50 km each way to take him there. I have had to help them with medical and financial things since they became ill. My job is the easiest part of my life right now.”

“I looked after my elderly mother until her death almost three years ago. It left me physically and financially drained. I doubt I'll ever recover.”

Lack of support for elderly dependants

“My father died in April 2000. He was hospitalized the last four months and required a lot of care for the six months previous to that. My mother could not do it all. The health care system is lacking in a big way. I was completely exhausted working full time, helping

my parents weekends and nights and trying to be there for teenage kids. When my mother gets sick, I will be there for her! But there is little support for eldercare in my organization – or in the community.”

“I look after my parents – 79 and 87 years old. They take a lot of my time. They have needs that are increasing the amount of time I need to give them each year. For example, as they get older they have more health problems and increased doctor/hospital visits. Unlike children, they become more dependent each year. I have often considered quitting my job to assist them with daily care. In fact, I probably will have to quit because I am unable to find suitable adult daycare for my mother, who has Alzheimer's. I feel pressure every day to give them the best quality of care, and I can't continue to work full time and do that too. We have maternity leave from work, paid by the government. It's time we had eldercare leave too. Like maternity leave, you could have your job waiting for you. This only makes sense, since parents sometimes need all the same care and attention as newborn babies.”

“I think that employers must recognize the huge responsibility that comes with caring for the elderly. Having helped my mother nurse my father through 27 years of Parkinson's disease has opened my eyes. Today our medical system cutbacks are placing more and more responsibility on our shoulders, while providing less assistance. My father is now gone, but I now have an 80-year-old mother-in-law and 78-year-old mother who are in need of great care and help. It is discouraging, disheartening and exhausting to try to do your best in both your home and work lives.”

Personal and Family Problems: Financial Strains

One percent of the comments linked imbalance to financial strain. These comments could be grouped as follows:

- Financial need to work more than one job
- Lack of financial security
- Money is tight

These sets of comments, which are particularly poignant, suggest that financial concerns are paramount for many Canadians and that it is difficult, if not impossible, to balance work and family if money is tight.

Financial need to work more than one job

“My work does not prevent my balancing of work, family and lifestyle. It is the lack of financial support by my employer which forces me to get a second job. This second job means I cannot balance my family and lifestyle.”

“I need two jobs, because neither provides enough income. Most of my co-workers also need two jobs. That's why the family and health stress.”

Lack of financial security

“My family state depends on my employment. Job security is lacking and rate of pay is a ping pong game controlled by others. Only option is to move (both job and home); not a choice if my child is to have a reasonable life. Pay may appear good, but after taxes, insurance, modest home, car and maintenance, I'm left wondering where it all went.”

“My position is both part-time casual and contract. I cannot be sure of my income. This gives me no stability. That is the only difficulty I have with my working here; otherwise, I love it.”

“Money is the only hardship we have. If we got what our jobs deserve we would be just fine. I am trying to start a home-based business while working full-time. I work 50 hours a week at work and 40 hours a week on my business. My paid employment only lasts six months out of each year. I am hoping that my business will support me the other six months so I can get off of EI [Employment Insurance] – which is more stressful than working two jobs.”

Money is tight

“I have enough work flexibility to spend quality time with my family, but due to financial constraints I spend time on other things. Saturdays are spent fixing one of three old cars – can't afford a new one; or doing home repairs – can't afford to hire anyone. Work is easy, but the financial stress of debt, taxes and children's interests is a killer.”

“In low-income families the emphasis is more focused on work, simply because the disposable income is not available for eating out, maid service, hired labourers for such jobs as painting and home repairs. Therefore, leisure time is mainly dedicated to extra chores.”

“Balancing work/family is more than a full-time job. Very difficult to juggle both demands. Unable to spend as much time with family as you would like. Money constraints make matters worse. Employees' wages have not kept up

with the cost of inflation. Very difficult to get ahead if you have limited education – experience doesn't seem to matter any more. Better benefits are given to employees who are already making more money than the average worker, i.e. parking. A lot of stress nowadays seems to be about monetary concerns – everything goes up but our wages. With more double-income families working in order to break even at month end, the family lifestyle has suffered.”

“Our main problems continue to be financial ones. In spite of advancing in the organization, I feel like we've fallen behind financially. The inability to afford the occasional holiday or weekend getaway means that the stress continues to accumulate. Anecdotal discussions with my colleagues indicate almost all of us feel we've regressed financially, and can't do the things we did 10 years ago.”

“Either taxes need to go down or we need to earn more money! Everything is going up except our pay cheques! Sometimes I think it would be better to quit my job and sponge off the government. Welfare! The government thinks I make too much, so no childcare subsidy for me! Daycare takes half my pay every month! I guess I should quit my job and collect welfare! At this rate, there will be no such thing as middle class in 20 years or sooner! My pay has not been adequate to keep up with the necessities of a moderate lifestyle, so both family and lifestyle suffer quite a bit.”

Personal and Family Problems: Comments that Say It All

“I love my job, but I work for the money. My major concern is that I have two small children who need more time than I can give because I work all day. My life is good in general, but a typical day is as follows: 6:00 a.m. wake up. 7:00 a.m. leave. 8:00 a.m. work. 6:30 p.m. get home and try to make supper while two kids who miss you to death whine and want your full attention. 7:30 eat – much too late. 8:00 p.m. bath, books. 8:00-9:00 p.m. – much too late – sleep then wake up again. This is not fair to the kids. On weekends it's not possible to have time for yourself or your husband because you want to spend time with the kids you haven't seen all week.”

“As children grow older, priorities and lifestyle change. Things that I was concerned with 10 years ago – before and after school childcare, etc. – no longer have any significance to me. Now as I prepare for children to go to university, financial concerns and eldercare are more important.”

“I believe that although the Canadian government talks like families are a priority for it, their tax laws are set up to work against a family trying to keep one parent home with the kids. As well, the social programs that exist are in place to assist families and family members after trauma, disruption, separation and divorce have occurred. There is very little or no support for families attempting to make it work

with one person being a primary homemaker/childcare giver. Therefore, both parents go to work to make ends meet, children are in the care of others or on their own, and everyone is tired, stressed and broke and the family structure falls apart. It is extremely difficult to balance one's personal health/wellness/happiness with family commitments and also make enough money to pay mortgages, bills, etc.”

“Just when you reach equilibrium, something new comes along. As the sole daughter of a progressively demented mother – her husband is dead – I have no one to share the responsibility with and there is no structure to support my need to support her. This is my number one source of stress. Stressful things at work are easier to live with – they're frustrating, but they don't hurt. Dealing with stress at home is more personal.”

“Two people have to work now just to pay the bills and expenses. Holidays are a luxury. User fees, gasoline, heating all going up. It is making it tougher.”

Part Two: Positive Observations with Respect to Work-Life Balance

In the survey, we asked individuals what impact work was having on their ability to spend time with their spouse, their children and their elderly dependants, on their ability to have some kind of leisure time, and on their relationships at home. While 50% of the respondents indicated that work was having a negative impact on their family, 10% said the opposite: that their work was having a positive impact on their family and personal life. Similarly, 10% of those who provided comments at the end of the survey were upbeat and had positive things to say about balance, their personal situation, their manager and their organization. Three types of positive comments are presented in this part of the report:

- General comments
- Comments about one's organization
- Comments about one's immediate manager

While not as numerous as those outlining challenges, the comments provided below give an alternative view of work-life balance.

General Comments

Five percent of the positive comments at the end of the survey were general in nature. They described how people thought of work-life balance or what made balance possible for them (they are the ones listed in Appendix A under the headings “balance,” “family” and “personal”). These comments were grouped into the following categories:

- What contributes to balance
- Family makes it possible
- It gets easier – having grown or older kids
- Young, single – and happy about it

Women, employees without eldercare responsibilities and employees in the private sector were more likely to give positive comments that were general in nature. More details on each of the categories can be obtained by reading the comments listed below.

What contributes
to balance

“Challenges occur daily, but somehow at the end of the day I am exhausted but feel a great sense of accomplishment. My husband is a wonderful support system. I also have one very best friend who is always there for me. My two children are at an age where they too are growing up and understand the pressures of work and school. In this we all try and support each other.”

“I am fortunate to be able to balance my work, family and lifestyle very well due to a number of factors including more than adequate financial income, an understanding partner to whom I reciprocate, great children, good friends, supportive and understanding parents, good community, and a very good and caring employer. Completing the survey has made me realize how fortunate my own personal situation must be compared to a majority of the working population.”

“I have a good balance. I work a longer than standard day (nine hours) and do some work in the evenings, but I make it home for dinner each night and find time for personal activities (golf and hockey). I have a good family life and career. I work hard to keep that balance, and my employer has not got in the way of that.”

“Both partners working full-time and having two children really is a busy life! The job I have isn't very stressful for me, thank goodness, and my hours are straight days. In order to spend time with my family, I have a house cleaner, which enables me and my family to have free time on weekends. Weekday evenings are always busy making supper, picking up kids from daycare, tidying up, etc., but I do look forward to weekends, which are mostly spent on activities we do as a family. Often my partner and I pay a sitter and we have a night out ourselves. All in all, our lives are busy, but for the most part we are fine.”

“My general philosophy on life has long been “everything in balance.” My life is the sum of many parts. I take enjoyment and satisfaction from my work, my family and leisure activities. I would not be happy or feel the same if any one of those parts were missing. The work I do today allows me to maintain that balance, and I appreciate that. As a manager, I have perhaps greater control and flexibility over my own schedule than others may.”

Family makes
it possible

“I could not do what I do at work without a strong partner and wonderful son who support me.”

“In today's society, I find it hard to find anyone who has excellent balance. It just does not happen. Everything costs money – most of the time you go without. But I always know after the usual bad day at work, I can go home to my family. That's what matters most.”

“I'm fortunate to have a caring, understanding spouse who has adapted and helped me adapt as my job circumstances have changed (office relocation and longer commute time, more overtime, etc.).”

“Balancing work, family and lifestyle can be difficult at times; however, our family really works as a team. I love what I do, and the extra time I spend in overtime – usually a couple of times per month – has not negatively impacted my family. Actually, it has made us stronger. My children see how happy I am and so look forward to the day when they get that good job too. It has also taught my children to be independent, and for this they are stronger and can make decisions when need be. They are very responsible. My husband and I have a very strong relationship and fully support each other's careers and decisions with the children. All in all, I believe we've done very well. Our kids are fantastic, like to do things together and with us, and have lots of friends.”

It gets easier –
having grown
or older kids

“I am in a situation where I can enjoy my work, family and friends. I have gone through the tougher times in my life as to family and work already. I'm looking forward to retiring as soon as my daughter completes university. My son is married and has a family of his own. I love my life and all who are in it.”

“Now that my children can be left alone and can help at home and can be relied upon to independently complete schoolwork (usually), life is less stressful. I can devote more time to my job, which I enjoy.”

“When my children were younger and I was a single parent with three teenagers at home, I would have answered this survey very differently. My age and stage of life makes a huge difference, as I feel in control of almost all of the decisions in my life.”

Young, single –
and happy
about it

“I am single. I make good money. Life is good.”

“I personally don't have a problem balancing work and family and lifestyle because I don't have any children, elderly people to take care of, or a spouse. I live on my own and have two roommates. Therefore, work doesn't interfere with family. Working overtime isn't a problem because I am single and living away from home and supporting myself.”

“It's not too bad living at home with my parents. I'm only 20, single, no kids, and I really like my job. I guess when I grow up it will be a lot harder to cope with work and family issues.”

Positive Comments about the Organization

Earlier we provided comments that illustrated how the environment at work, the culture and organizational practices made achieving work-life balance difficult for Canadians. This section talks about “best practice” organizations – ones that make a difference. The rarity of these kinds of organizations can be inferred from the fact that 4% of the comments with respect to organizations were positive, whereas just over 40% were negative. What makes a company “best practice” with respect to work-life balance? The comments would suggest such a company:

- has implemented flexible work arrangements;
- offers a supportive, caring work environment; and
- concretely supports work-life balance.

Respondents in the private sector sample and those working in management and professional positions were substantially more likely to make positive comments about their organization. Very few of the respondents in the not-for-profit sector sample gave comments that fell into this grouping. The following comments provide further illustration of how an employer's actions can play a critical role with respect to balance.

Has implemented flexible work arrangements

“The flexibility of my employer is the only reason I survive. My husband is either at work or asleep. My extended family lives nine hours away. My two-year-old goes to bed between 10:00 p.m. and midnight, and both children are up several times in the night. My husband works nights two weeks, then days for two weeks. I know several career women with young families who have left higher-paying jobs to work in my organization because of our family benefits, family-related leave, flextime, compressed time, job security, no forced overtime. I am sure I would either be divorced or under psychiatric care without these benefits.”

“Being able to work both part-time and a compressed work week, as well as having the option of taking unpaid leave, and leave with income averaging, has been the number one reason for my high level of job satisfaction in the last two years. This flexibility allowed me to cope with the needs of a family with pre teen/teenage children and the needs of dying parents. Being able to take unpaid leave allowed me to deal with clearing up estates, etc., as well as personal emotional issues. I think that by allowing employees time to effectively deal with personal and family issues, employers also ensure that they have effective, satisfied and loyal employees who are able to give their all when they are on duty. It is important to note, however, that some of the above options are only helpful to employees for whom financial issues are not a factor.”

“This employer goes far and beyond what is required to accommodate everyone. All paid: compressed schedules, flex hours, family-related leave, appointments and illness, medical/dental appointments, good sick leave benefits, part-time work, income averaging, and the option of leave without pay with your job held for you.”

Offers a supportive, caring work environment

“In the last two years, I have lost both parents to cancer. I was primary caregiver for both. This company was excellent in granting the time off and the moral support that I needed in my capacity as caregiver. After the death of my father six months ago, I required extended time off to deal with my grief. I never felt pressure to return to work, and any conversations with my manager or medical department were very supportive. For this I will always be thankful.”

“I am going through a legal separation and divorce. My employer and colleagues have been wonderful to me throughout this difficult time. I am so grateful to be working here, instead of at my previous job. I have relied extensively on their support.”

“This company has been excellent in emotional and financial support and helping me to cope in day to day life. I am in a return to work program as a result of an ongoing back injury. The corporation that I am employed by has an extremely accommodating program for injured workers, whether the injury is work-related or otherwise. There are many programs available to assist employees in both mental and physical health disciplines. I have had nothing but factual, positive help from those administering the programs. Although there is a perceived stigmatism that is attached to assistance, I am not aware of any difficulties in this area. Everyone has been very helpful, from human resources to local managers and co-workers.”

“When my elderly mother was not well, I received tremendous support from management and co workers. She was very ill for many months prior to her death and I was allowed tremendous latitude. Without this understanding and support, I have no idea how I could have coped. With it, I was able to be there for her and still keep working. Needless to say, I feel a great deal of loyalty to my employer.”

Concretely supports work-life balance

“My employer does an excellent job of trying to ensure employees have the opportunity to develop a balanced approach to life and work.”

“The ability to balance work and family life is the main reason why I chose X as an employer.”

“I feel X has given me the necessary tools to work with to accomplish a well-balanced work, family and lifestyle. I have been with this organization for 21 years and have never had any regrets for being under its employment. When I look at the conditions that some people have to work under, I am thankful to be able to say I work for X. My family all know that we live very well in relation to many other families and do not take things for granted.”

Positive Comments on the Manager

Our research in this area suggests that what company you work for has less impact on an employee's ability to balance than to whom you report. As was observed earlier, many employees talked about how their own manager's attitudes and behaviour had made balance more difficult. While smaller in number (only 1% of all the comments related to having a supportive manager, while 9% dealt with having a non-supportive manager), some employees talked passionately about how their manager had made all the difference in the world in their lives. These comments were grouped as follows:

- Manager is supportive
- Manager understands the need for work-family balance
- Manager gives needed flexibility

Employees in the private sector were more likely to talk about how their manager had made balance possible. Managers who wish to become more helpful may find the following comments illuminating.

Manager is
supportive

“My current manager is very supportive. I have had others here that were not. I find that the views of your immediate supervisor can outweigh the views of the organization.”

“There is more support in the immediate work environment from my manager and colleagues than from the organization at large.”

“I am very fortunate to have a great boss who is very accommodating and more than makes up for organizational shortcomings.”

“My supervisor is extremely understanding and gets the most out of her staff by being nice. There are too many supervisors here who are at the other end of the spectrum.”

“I have been in my current position for one year and have a very supportive manager. My previous position could be described as hell. I suffered from stress, depression and a boss that played mind games and didn't care about the people at X. My previous manager only cared about keeping those higher up happy. There was no balancing of lifestyle.”

Manager understands the need for work-family balance

“The current work environment is very conducive to a “balanced life” approach, thanks in large part to the support we receive from my boss to perpetuate the concept. I am very fortunate to have the person I have as my supervisor!”

“I am very happy in my current job. I feel that it has a lot to do with my supervisor. He is someone who understands, himself, how important balancing work and family is. In the past I have worked for supervisors who, sadly, did not realize the importance. I consider myself very lucky to be in a job that allows for some flexibility, but really feel that, in the end, it's my supervisor that I can thank for making me enjoy coming to work every day.”

“Our supervisor is great and respects and encourages family life, and in return we are a happier, more productive staff. It's a win-win situation. I have been lucky and my supervisors have been confident and appreciative of my work and trust me and care about my family needs.”

“Sometimes companies have great values and a lot of good will! However, the values are implemented by each individual to various degrees. Your direct boss has a lot to do with your satisfaction. For example, I've recently changed positions and my new boss is extremely open-minded and very good at understanding family responsibilities and issues. Because of this, he gets very positive results. If you had asked me the same questions in my old position, the results would have been very different. But I still work for the same company.”

Manager gives needed flexibility

“The single largest factor that allows a balance between work and family is my ability to flex my work hours and the use of family days and vacation days when I need or want them. This is supported by my supervisor, who allows this autonomy. It is not formally supported by the organization!”

“Many of the questions were positively answered because of the manager I work for. She is the one who allots so much flexibility and enjoyment to the job – not the corporation.”

“I personally have a supportive work environment and supportive manager. I work more hours than I'm paid for, but enjoy flexibility to meet personal demands because my manager focuses on output and results – not hours at the desk.”

“My manager is great. She allows more freedom to work at home. It is not our organization's policy to allow us to work from home; she bends the rules. She is also extra flexible with family time, funerals and any personal challenges we have. I have worked with other managers in the same organization that have caused me excessive stress because of their inflexibility and insistence on organizational policy.”

Part Three: Achieving a Balance

Not only are working Canadians able to articulate the challenges associated with work-life balance, they are also able to provide recommendations on how to change things for the better. How can this be done? Respondents identified two approaches: personal solutions (things that they themselves can do) and changes at the organizational or societal level that would help working Canadians combine a career with a “life.” In other words, the comments at the end of the survey reflect the fact that the issue of work-life conflict has multiple stakeholders and that solutions are needed at both the micro level (the individual employee and family) and the macro level (the organization and Canadian society). Balance can be achieved only through a partnership: employers and employees must both do their part.

This part of the report focuses on what the employees themselves can do to “get control of their lives.” Eleven percent of all the comments given at the end of the survey fell into this grouping. Managers and professionals, men and respondents in the not-for-profit sector sample were more likely than those in other groups to offer suggestions on how employees could personally take steps to achieve a balance.

This section is divided into two parts. The first focuses on personal strategies employed Canadians have used to take control of their life. The second talks about the choices they have made along the way. It is hoped that this set of strategies will offer hope and direction for employees who are still struggling to take control over their lives.

Achieving a Balance: Personal Strategies

Six percent of the working Canadians who gave comments at the end of the survey talked about how they had personally achieved balance. Analysis of these comments (which are classified as “balance,” “family” and “personal” in Appendix A) suggests that the following personal strategies may help employed Canadians achieve a balance:

- Use your faith to help put life into perspective
- Be organized
- Recognize that balance takes work – and work at it
- Have goals
- Put things into perspective – “don't sweat the small stuff”
- Enjoy life – focus on what is going well, not what is stressful
- Find a job you enjoy
- Have a supportive partner who does his or her share at home
- Remain fit and use exercise as a way to deal with stress

These strategies, described below by people who practise them, provide a good starting point for Canadians who wish to put their life in order.

Use your faith
to help put life
into perspective

“I am blessed to have my wife and children to help me care for my father, who lives with us and suffers from Alzheimer's disease. My work and home life is a constant balancing act between my strong sense of professional duty and commitment and my love of family. My faith helps me see the blessings in the midst of confusion.”

“With God, all things are possible – it's in the Bible. The word of God, the Bible, is a mentally, emotionally and spiritually healthy way to balance all personal, interpersonal, work-related, community responsibilities. It is a rock to stand on in this crazy world – a strength.”

“I can best describe my values as Christian values. Regardless of my circumstances, I cope by trusting in my God Jesus Christ to meet my needs or to show me the way. I manage to do a fairly good job of managing those things which I have control over. More importantly, I am thankful to have somewhere to turn when things go beyond my ability to control them – prayer.”

“From my own experience, without a vibrant faith in God and an awareness of His love for all people, I'm not sure I'd get out of bed in the morning.”

Be organized

“The most important issues related to having a good balance are organization, planning and time management. This means planning meals a week in advance, laying out clothes the night before and spending as much evening time with young children as possible.”

“It helps if you can be scheduled ahead of time so you can plan, with your family, meals, chores and out of home activities. Sometimes that's not possible. Be positive – make do! Kraft dinner again! This is when restaurants, family, relatives and friends are a godsend. Have faith in yourself and others.”

“I've worked for 30 years – there are peaks and valleys in this balancing act. One of my favourite balancing solutions is to start each month off by writing in my daytimer all family scheduled events, adding going out for dinners and family-created events. Then I work around that schedule if and when extra work is required.”

Recognize that balance takes work – and work at it

“Achieving balance between work and family is an extremely important personal goal. It requires considerable cooperation and effort on the part of individuals within the family and in the workplace. It also requires daily sacrifices and trade-offs (e.g. reduced working hours = less pay and fewer discretionary purchases). One must be wholly committed to achieving the balance, or else one component will suffer. Personally, I have found that all parties must be a bit flexible at times, even if it is inconvenient.”

“Balance is a skill that needs to be taught and developed – it doesn't just happen.”

“Balance is a necessary part of life. It is up to you to manage it. The choices made have costs and benefits associated with them. It is something that always has to be kept in mind to ensure that no component is neglected for too long.”

Have goals

“Know your goal and plan accordingly. Know your priority in life and what is important. Be considerate to others (do not be self-centred), but don't depend on others. Know how to trust yourself and know the limit of what you can do, and live by it. Know how much you can trust others. Be confident but not overbearing.”

Put things into perspective – “don't sweat the small stuff”

“If your work or job is very important to you and of course your family is very, very important to you, then you learn to work things out and compromise. The things you can change, you should do your best to change them. Recognize that the things you cannot change or influence are not worth the time worrying about. It takes commitment, and as the expression goes, ‘don't sweat the small stuff’.”

“Past generations dealt with family and work too. Is our society so changed that we can't deal with life any more? More people should just step back and analyze their lives before worrying about it.”

“Stress is not something you can measure, it truly is not. The same factors affecting two different individuals will do so differently. People are stressed in this world because they choose to let things bother them. The stuff they have no control over, don't waste time trying to control it. Put it in perspective.”

“I think often we look at the negative aspects instead of how lucky we are. But, by the same token, why shouldn't it keep getting better?”

“I don't stress out about daily life situations and I remember how fortunate I am to be healthy and safe. Most of all, you only live once and you need to strive for what you want and make the best of it. I don't want to regret anything I didn't do now when I am older.”

Enjoy life – focus on what is going well, not what is stressful

“Strong family ties and friends' relationships help my balance of life. Extra outside interests (volunteer work and evening classes) enhance my appreciation of my good fortune in life. The odd glass of a good Cabernet never hurts either!”

“Canadians are driven by the pathetic work ethic of working to live, living to work. There is more to life than this. Relax, take a siesta. Enjoy your life – more than two days out of it.”

“Take time to play, laugh, love, work, cry together and respect each other. We all make mistakes at home and work. Take time for your family, yourself, and smile.”

“Take one hour, one day at a time and enjoy it to the fullest and be very thankful for every moment of good health, for this is the greatest treasure of all.”

Find a job you enjoy

“Work in our society is part of your life. If you don't enjoy your work....”

“I think it's easier if you're working because you want to and not entirely because you have to.”

“My job is very stressful but it is also my passion and I find it extremely enjoyable and rewarding. I would not want to be doing anything else. My family and friends understand and appreciate the demands and the rewards of my job and they are all very supportive.”

“I feel it is very important that one enjoys/feels rewarded by the work one does during the day. If one is unhappy at work, their personal life suffers and their health is affected.”

Have a supportive partner who does his or her share at home

“In today's busy world, I am fortunate to have a spouse that does many extras around the house as well as with our children. As he has a very flexible job, he does most of the housework and errands. I personally could not cope if I had to do most of everything. One main component for me for a healthy balance is a supportive spouse. Giving each other support and encouragement for self time is a big stress reliever. Knowing there is choice and support makes a world of difference in the perception of stress.”

Remain fit and use exercise as a way to deal with stress

“I feel that if you deal with stress effectively, i.e. exercising, you will be able to balance work, family and life. If you prioritize and schedule time for working out and exercising, you will improve your life and the life of others around you by maintaining a healthy and positive attitude and lifestyle.”

“I use physical exercises as a stress reliever. I run and work out at a gym five days a week. My running allows me to de stress prior to going home to my family. My spouse also works out and this helps him with his job as a firefighter and a childcare provider to our children. The physical action of running allows me to get my stress out and it gives me time to myself to think my problems through.”

“I feel people who exercise regularly are better able to handle stress. I get up at 5:00 a.m. to start my day by exercising, and it improves the quality of my day. I also believe in recognizing the need for leisure activities that you enjoy, feeling connected to the community, and having goals for the future. I generally enjoy my work and do not feel stressed.”

Solutions: People Make Choices

Just under 6% of the solutions that have worked for the respondents in this sample related to making choices and setting priorities. These choices included:

- Consciously separate work and home
- Consciously put family first
- Reduce the amount of time devoted to paid employment
- Choose shift work so one partner is at home to care for the children
- Learn to make do with less

- Have a partner who does not work outside the home
- Make time for hobbies and for yourself
- Decide not to have children
- Postpone having children

Details on the implications of each of these choices are given below.

Consciously
separate work
and home

“I have always attempted to keep my work life separate from personal/family life. Except for a very few cases, I keep my work life to regular work hours. For the past 20 years, I have taken advantage of a compressed work week whenever authorized. This has allowed me to work slightly longer days in exchange for more full days to devote to personal/family life. I give 100% to my work – just not 100% of the time.”

“I believe that you leave the work at the office and enjoy your family and personal life. It seems that most organizations would like it if you lived and breathed your job even if it runs into your personal time. I enjoy my job and like to be busy and will give it my all while I'm there, but I leave the office at 4:30.”

“Over the past 10 years, I have seen many go out on stress leave. I handle the stress by leaving the office at the end of the day and doing other things. My other activities keep me sane. There are lots of times I go home frustrated and mad because there is so much going on and so many interruptions. It seems the harder you work, the further you get behind. So I go out most nights and usually come in the next day refreshed. I do not work overtime because I need to get away from the office at the end of the day.”

Consciously
put family first

“In the last four years, there have been several deaths of people who were close to me. These events and the terminal illness of a dear friend have served to remind me of the importance of family – how family must come before work. I strive to do a good job at work, but also try to remember that although work is important, family is more so.”

“When my kids were small, I worked half-days. When I lost a job due to downsizing, I became committed to family over work. Two takeovers later, I continue to work, but it's still family first. I'm so glad I made that decision while my family was still quite young. My priority helped me cope with

subsequent takeovers. It really paid off. My current job is now terminal. Our office is closing June 2001. Put time into family – it really pays off. No amount of company loyalty or work ethic, etc., can save your job when the company decides to close the doors.”

“All the money in the world is no good to you if your children and family are neglected to get it. You can heal some wounds, but you can't go back and replace what was lost.”

“We tend to live in a material world where a large percentage of people think they need material goods to be successful. Personally, I think anyone who thinks their job or career is more important than their family is an idiot. Success should be defined by the type of person you are, not by what you have or how much you make or what job you work at.”

“The only way I have achieved a balance in my life was to stop going up the corporate ladder. I am satisfied with my present job and can enjoy my family life and my own activities without being stressed out.”

Reduce the amount of time devoted to paid employment (use part-time, job share and reduced work week arrangements)

“I would have answered this survey differently a year ago. I switched to part-time employment a year ago due to health and personal concerns. I was fortunate

that management allowed me to do this and that my family financial situation allowed this. Since going part-time, I have been better able to get up in the morning and cope with the day. I can now handle things at home better (meals, shopping, laundry, etc.).”

“I wouldn't feel as positive about life personally if I had to work full-time. For me, part-time with flexible hours allows me to “keep up with life.” My personal health and spiritual goals are more able to be met due to the extra time I have.”

“The ideal situation for me has been to work a part-time flexible schedule with freedom to take time off when I've needed to for vacation plans, sick leave, etc. I work with great people, completely understanding of my family situation and personal needs. My job is second to my family, always has been and always will be. I have been lucky to have managers who allow me to work three days a week. This has enabled me to do a good job at work and home.”

“As I work only mornings, I find that I have little trouble balancing my work and family life. I am able to schedule personal appointments, etc., around my working hours, and when the need arises my bosses and I are able to agree on when and where to make up a missed hour of work.”

Choose shift work so one partner is at home to care for the children

“I have two preschool-aged children, two and four years old. I work full-time 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and my spouse works 5:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. to balance our life with our children. We feel it's important that we raise our children (not a babysitter!), so we choose to work these hours even if it means not seeing each other until they are both in school full-time. Because my spouse or I are always with our children, we do not have any time for leisure, physical fitness activities, etc. We choose to be with our children, so everything else is second!”

“Our family is in a fortunate position, in that my wife works 60% of the time but that includes weekends and evenings. As a result, we only require a babysitter four days a month. This has allowed me to have more one-on-one time with our son, who accepts either one of us readily as his primary parent/caregiver. Of course, we would like to spend more time together as a family or just a couple, but for now it is a comfortable and happy medium. Our professions allow us a very comfortable standard of living without sacrificing time with our son.”

Learn to make do with less

“You do what you can with what you have. We don't have a new house or fancy cars and we haven't been on vacation in years, but that's okay. If you are always striving for the unobtainable, or the far future, then how can you be happy in the present?”

“It is possible to feel richer by wanting less.”

“Unfortunately, our material world has many people overworking, generally striving for more. In general people have more, but less in balance and quality in their lives. Big houses – new cars – no time? The stress is evident on working families chasing big dreams, yet not noticing single special moments life offers us daily.”

“Not being greedy about material possessions and recognizing that money is only one factor contributing to a successful life and relationships helps tremendously. As long as people want to have it all, I believe they will feel stressed and have great difficulty balancing work, family and lifestyle. My spouse and I decided long ago that my main contribution to our marriage would be finances, while hers would be raising a well-balanced child. I believe she contributes far more to our marriage than I do. While we have had to make some sacrifices financially, compared with some of my peers, we have very

successfully been able to balance work, family and lifestyle, simply because we have determined what is important to us, what each partner will do to achieve our objectives, and we put a high value on non monetary factors.”

Have a partner who does not work outside the home

“Balancing work and family can be a tough one, but luckily my spouse and I have decided that one parent should be at home with the children. The only reason that it is my spouse who stays at home is because my salary was greater than hers. Having a parent at home is a real blessing for our family. It means having to get by with less (i.e. second-hand clothes, outings, etc.), but these are very small sacrifices compared to what we see in our children. They are loving, happy-go lucky kids.”

“The key factor contributing to the ability to balance family and work is the fact that my wife has been at home caring for our four children since we married 17 years ago. Her role in the home provides for the majority of the stability and sense of accomplishment regarding the fact that we both think that quantity, not just quality of time, is an important factor in raising children.”

“My wife is a stay-at-home mom. This eliminates many of the problems and costs involved with balancing children and two careers. I could not do the work I do if my wife was not at home. Many answers to these questions would be different if my wife was not at home.”

Make time for hobbies and for yourself

“Leave work at work, enjoy your off time with your family, but take a few minutes out for some quiet time on your own – be it a walk alone or some quiet music and cup of tea. When alone, find relaxing things to do such as needlework, painting.”

“In the past, I wanted to be a super mom/wife/teacher, etc. Now I am older and wiser and realize something will give if I don't stop that – me! I have consciously given myself more private time as my boys grow older.”

Decide not to have children

“I would never marry while working full time – it is too much. I don't know how others do it, but all through my work life I've heard all the complaints and decided to remain single. It's easier, but the income is not high and it is still stressful.”

“My husband and I do not have children. This is by design to reduce stress in our lives – we are conscious of having a balance of work and personal life.”

“My partner and I would like to have children. We have decided not to have any because we both work full time hours and feel that we would not have the time or energy to bring up children properly. If one income could support a family, I would stay home and have more than one child. As it is, both our incomes are needed for our rent, transportation, food and bills.”

Postpone
having
children

“I'm 35 years old. Would like to have another child but am postponing until my employer finishes restructuring our workplace. I feel a pregnancy could affect my marketability.”

“I do not have any children right now and I'm in my thirties. I wonder, though, how I would manage a full-time job and children. In my situation, I do need a double income – my partner's and mine. If there was on site daycare, that would be great. Nowadays you don't know who you can trust with your children. Also, I don't want to be working just to pay for daycare. How do people manage this?”

Part Four: Recommendations to Employers and Governments

Of the comments made by Canadians who filled out our survey, 10% could be considered recommendations. Not surprisingly, many of these recommendations speak directly to the challenges presented earlier. They are grouped into two main categories:

- Recommendations to organizations
- Recommendations at the policy level

Women, employees working in clerical and administrative positions, respondents in the public sector sample and those with childcare and eldercare responsibilities were more likely to give comments that were classified within this grouping. Organizations and governments who want to make a difference with respect to the issue of work-life balance will find a lot of valuable material in the comments quoted below.

Recommendations to Organizations

Just over 3% of the recommendations given by respondents to this survey were targeted at the organization for whom they worked. This set of comments was grouped into the following four categories:

- Managers
- Organizational support of balance
- Daycare
- Fitness facilities

A review of these comments indicates that most employees want their organizations to focus on actions associated with balance rather than on the implementation of more work-life policies.

Managers

“I think the best thing that could be done to help balance home/work would be to make sure that the entire managerial staff of an organization is clear on what is acceptable and what isn't. Whether you can take a vacation day or not, or use family-related leave, should not depend on who your team leader is.”

“Strongly recommend education and awareness among managers/supervisors. This needs to be addressed in both the private and public sector.”

Organizational
support of balance

“Completing this questionnaire made me realize how temporal these issues are in a person's life. When my mom was dying seven years ago and my youngest child was five years old, it was difficult. The supports we need aren't forever. We need extra help when kids are too young to be left alone and when parents are in need. I may need help again if my husband, who is [medical condition specified], should need more help as we age. I think it's important to realize how different each employee's needs might be and that we don't need a blanket policy for all employees, only employees in special circumstances.”

“I appreciate it is difficult for companies to keep every employee content; however, if it is a company's desire to employ professional personnel with a high work ethic, they should expect to be required to acknowledge home concerns and reasonably provide support and assistance.”

“I believe that a company should support an employee in good times, when life is well, and in difficult times such as illness, death of a close relative, change in financial status, childcare difficulties. The fact that an employee knows that his/her company is supportive would certainly alleviate additional stress. I believe in cooperation and honesty in an employee/employer relationship.”

“We all get a turn in life with heavy demands on us, more so for some than others. Support and understanding from work could be what gets you through it.”

Daycare

“One thing that would significantly improve my ability to balance work and lifestyle: in-house daycare at the company I work for. I feel I could be more productive and happier if I could take my child to work and spend noon hours with him and be reassured that if he needed me, I would be in the same building.”

“One primary concern to people like me with young children is daycare facilities. If daycare facilities were situated in or near the work sites, parents would be less stressed. Imagine a parent spending two extra hours on average (travelling time to and from work and lunch) with a three or four-year-old child. The child would benefit, the parent would benefit, and the employer would benefit too!”

“I strongly believe that companies should implement affordable on-site daycare facilities with licensed daycare personnel. It would be less stressful on families, less travelling time and a sense of security knowing that your child is nearby.”

Fitness facilities

“It would be wonderful and very helpful to many staff to have a gym, workplace facilities to work out, showers, etc. The presence of an exercise facility would not only increase the health and well-being of the employee, but overlap into a more productive employee.”

“I think any large company like the one I work for should provide a facility where the employees can work out, in other words a fitness facility. If the company cannot provide its own, it should provide the means for employees to get a discounted rate or pay for the fee entirely at an existing facility. Physically and mentally fit people tend to be more productive employees.”

Recommendations at the Policy Level

Eight percent of the respondents made recommendations with respect to policies that either organizations or governments could implement that would, in their opinion, make it easier for people to combine work and non-work responsibilities. These comments were grouped into the following categories:

- Improve benefits
- Increase flexibility with respect to hours of work
- Enhance leave (i.e. maternity, paternity, family days, sick days, special leave)
- Reduce the amount of time employees are expected to spend in work
- Support the traditional family structure

One additional set of comments is included with these recommendations, although their tenor is quite different. Some Canadians argued passionately for the need to go back to the traditional family structure and the need for governments to do more to support the traditional family.

Improve benefits

“With regard to drug coverage, changes should be made whereby staff are given a drug card to cover purchasing medication. This would eliminate the need for paying cash up front for those who live on a tight budget with limited disposable income.”

“I understand the present employment structure favours employment of part-time not full-time, because of employer benefit payments. This is not right. Part-time employees should get the same benefits as full-time – not less benefits.”

Increase flexibility with respect to hours of work

“Flexibility, flexibility and more flexibility.”

“Flexibility of work hours would help, especially for those unexpected family medical emergencies. While I think there is more sensitivity and awareness of the parenting needs of young children, this does not extend to adolescents or care of elderly relatives. I personally feel very conflicted about taking a day off work to take care of elderly parents or when my teenager is sick. The work milieu does not make it easy. Parents and grandparents need flexibility in work hours for family duties at all stages in their lives. If we take care of our families properly, we will be able to fulfill our work duties without distraction.”

“Would like the human resources department to be more proud of its flexible time policies and flex even more. Family time and commitment to raising children is becoming more a priority for men, and having flextime for men is an important issue for today's workforce.”

Enhance leave

“I'd like to see a top up of maternity leave money to supplement what's supplied by EI [Employment Insurance] – 55% is not enough!”

“I feel that employees should have one to two days per year where they can have a stress or personal day with pay. Many people cannot afford to lose a day's pay but don't want to abuse their sick days if they are not physically sick. I believe that this could only improve morale, which would ultimately improve work output.”

“It would be extremely helpful to have family leave days or special leave days for family. This would relieve a fair amount of stress when a child or spouse is ill. We could care for them guilt-free.”

“I feel that instead of trying to define the types of family leave, such as pre-school or eldercare, we should just say Leave for Dependent Family Members. This way, we are not stuck with restrictive definitions. People have other family care besides these two.”

“Eldercare issues are and will continue to be a major challenge for many employees. If employees were given a handful of family or personal days, I'm sure we would have fewer illegitimate sick days.”

“It would be beneficial to be able to take unpaid days for children's sick days instead of vacation time, as this depletes your time off for relaxation and rejuvenation. Further help would be the choice to take an unpaid leave of absence for short terms (i.e. two weeks to two months) to spend time with family.”

“Banked sick time should be portable, and bereavement leave for close relatives should be longer.”

“Allotting a set amount of sick days on a yearly basis would prevent people from dragging themselves into work and infecting others. A more generous vacation plan should be looked into. Waiting 10 years for an additional week seems too long. Why not give an extra day every one to two years?”

Reduce the amount of time employees are expected to spend in work

“Talking is all we do about these concerns. Why don't we propose nine eight-hour days every two weeks as a proposed work schedule? Employees need more time off. Commuting to work wastes a lot of time, and traffic is terrible. This would take some pressure off employees. In 25 years, work has changed very little. When I entered the workforce, everyone talked of a shorter week. In fact, it is longer now.”

“Government must develop innovative strategies which promote balancing work and family – introducing incentives such as flex policies would be great. Promoting a working smarter rather than harder work philosophy would free up time for families. The problem is that people are not thinking beyond the box. They feel physical presence is more important than actual production.”

“I have just begun part-time employment (four days per week) and it is the best thing I could have done for my mental and physical health. It was, however, very difficult to obtain. Job sharing and part-time employment must be better promoted and supported by managers and senior directors.”

“I believe that one of western civilization's greatest failures in the past century has been insufficient progress in providing most workers with more leisure time. I am grateful that my work hours are fairly standard, and that overtime is rare. Nevertheless, I would enthusiastically move to a three or four-day work week, or more weeks of personal leave, in return for reduced pay.”

“A four-day work week would be nice. If I remember correctly, that was mentioned in the 1970s.”

Support the traditional family structure

“I truly feel mothers should be paid to stay home to raise their children. It would produce a much better society. Our children would feel secure and have a loving parent as a caregiver, instead of strangers who do not care.”

“Taking time with my family is very important. Parents need to be there for their children. Because of financial needs, I have to work an extra job to meet my family's needs. I find this is common with lots of people I know. My wife and I chose to raise a family – my wife stays home because she wants to.... The government offers no incentives to a mother to stay home. Two working parents receive tax credit benefits, however. It seems that parents who choose to stay home get penalized. I feel if parents were able to choose to stay home with their children, families would be stronger, they could concentrate on education and family life. There would be fewer crimes, less disrespect of the law, and children would have somebody to talk to.”

“There should be more financial benefits for having children – tax write-offs (more than current), pensionable contributions for the parent that stays home.”

“I believe that society and companies should encourage people to care for their own children. As an incentive, offer wages to stay-at-home moms or dads. Savings would be realized from medical purposes, higher productivity and less crime. Instead of studies and money poured into daycare, educate young families on the importance of child rearing. When the day is done and you have worked until retirement, that is really all you have.”

“Families need more support. Employers and government need to realize that it costs them a lot when workers are stressed and unhappy. Families are the basis of our society. Hard-working, law abiding, honest families need more breaks and support for responsibilities and financial burdens. Families are being made more and more to carry the burden of health costs, fund-raising for schools, etc., and volunteering our time. Not fair! Families are very stressed. Very few families can afford to have one parent be a full time caregiver, and that's very difficult for the family.”

Part Five: Summary and Conclusions

This report provides a summary of the key issues with respect to work-life balance as seen by Canadians struggling with these issues. One of the hardest parts of writing this report was to pare down the comments so the reader would not be overwhelmed. We were struck when reading the 1,000-plus pages of comments with:

- how complex the lives of Canadians are at this time;
- the number of recurring themes in the comments; and
- the extent to which work-life issues “bleed” into each other. While we separate life into neat little work and non-work domains with respect to research, social policy, and so on, many Canadians are not living this reality. Their work and their lives are, in fact, quite intricately connected, and changes in one domain echo in the other.

Who were Canadians talking to when they wrote their comments? Some were talking to us, the researchers. They were telling us what their lives are really like and elaborating on issues that did not fit neatly into a five-point scale. The majority, however, were talking to their employers and the various levels of government (municipal, provincial, federal) that have an influence over work-life policies. Comments to employers tended to be complaints about conditions at work, requests for changes, recommendations on how things could be done better within the organization, and positive feedback with respect to the things that they liked. Comments directed to governments, on the other hand, tended to be cries for help or relief.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a substantial number of respondents were simply talking to one another when they made their comments. In this case, they were trying to help their fellow employees by sharing their strategies for balance and giving advice to others on what had worked for them.

Why did respondents take the time to write remarks at the end of our survey? A review of the comments included in this report suggests that many viewed our request for comments as an opportunity to air their opinions and, in many cases, push for change. Policy makers and governments should take heed.

What Does Work-Life Conflict Look Like?

The comments reproduced in this report give us a better appreciation of what work-life conflict looks like when one is living it. It is having a job that interferes with your family life. It is when your family interferes with your career and your ability to get ahead at work. It is when housework interferes with time for yourself. It is having a long commute to and from work that takes a toll on your energy. It is role overload – having too much to do in the amount of time available. It is being crunched for time – constantly. It is going it alone as a single parent or living with a workaholic. It is balancing two or more jobs with a life. It is balancing work and education with a life. It is postponing having children (perhaps forever) because you cannot see how you can manage one more thing.

If one uses the number of comments in a particular area as the gauge, it seems that most Canadians see “work” as the main offender with respect to conflict between work and life. Respondents were five times more likely to talk about problems at work that negatively affected their ability to have a life outside of work than problems at home. Furthermore, there was a greater degree of consensus among these Canadians on what it was about work that was making balance more untenable (workloads, non-supportive managers and organizational cultures) than there was on what was problematic on the non-work end of the equation. Problems at home appear to be more personal and diverse in nature.

What are the problems at the organizational level? High workloads due to downsizing, unrealistic expectations, a lack of planning and priorities, a lack of resources, and office technology. An organizational culture that does not support balance (i.e. focus on hours, focus on money). Organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring and amalgamating that increase workloads and work stress and decrease job security. Upper management who are not supportive of work-life balance and an immediate manager who is non-supportive.

The personal and family circumstances that Canadians identified as being problematic included the death of a family member, divorce or separation, being a parent or step-parent, having responsibility for eldercare, lack of support within the community, physical or mental health problems, lack of time for personal or family roles, caring for a disabled dependant, and having both childcare and eldercare responsibilities. The comments suggest that many of the issues on the family side of the work-life equation are more transient in nature and depend on one's stage in life. In other words, employees need different types of support at different points in their life. This suggestion reinforces the need for flexibility at work and within the community.

It is also important to note the impact of financial strain on work-life balance. The comments with respect to financial strain suggest that balance is virtually impossible in lower-income families. The causes of financial strain need to be addressed at both the organizational and government levels.

What Makes a Difference at the Organizational Level?

The data also allow us to draw conclusions with respect to what factors reduce conflict between work and life. Organizations that wish to make it easier for employees to balance competing demands need to focus on the behaviour of their managers, the implementation of flexible work arrangements and a supportive culture.

The view that employees' work-life balance is often at the discretion of individual managers was very much evident among the comments given by respondents. Whether by interpreting company policy fairly, or sometimes by working around it, the manager appears to be key with respect to solving work-life conflicts. Those who wrote positively about their managers, while not great in number, expressed gratitude that they worked for understanding individuals who recognize and make accommodations for the employee's life outside of work.

A number of the positive comments about organizations referred to flexibility regarding work hours as an important factor in achieving balance. Whether commenting on a general relaxed attitude toward hours of work, or the options of flextime, compressed work weeks, telework, part-time work, leave

without pay, or income averaging, employees expressed appreciation that their organization offered this flexibility. Some stated that without this flexibility they would not be able to take part in the workforce. Flexibility around work hours, promotion of work-life balance, and understanding in the event of illness or bereavement were the major reasons for positive comments about the organization.

Respondents were also appreciative of their organization's support and promotion of work-life balance for employees. The organization that established policies and implemented practices that supported balance was seen by many to be an “employer of choice.” Comments ranged from employees' expressions of thanks for family leave days to recognition of the organization's efforts to create an environment where balance is encouraged. Many comments were of a personal nature, recounting how the organization had helped the employee to deal with death, serious illness or eldercare issues. These employees were grateful for the humanity, caring and understanding shown by the organization to employees dealing with personal difficulties.

Finally, it should be noted that while the organizations represented in this study varied considerably with respect to their policies and practices, the data indicate that it is in the best interest of employers to take whatever measures they can to accommodate employees' responsibilities outside work. Balance among employees may be strongly linked to the “bottom line.”

Conclusions

The Canadian workers whose comments are the foundation of this report speak passionately about the need to address the issue of work-life balance. The following general conclusions can be drawn from these comments:

- Work-life balance is a complex phenomenon.
- Many factors contribute to high work-life conflict.
- Work and life are not separate domains.
- Many Canadians are having difficulties balancing work and family because organizations are not taking the issue seriously and are not treating it as a business issue.
- Some Canadians are having problems balancing work and family because of conditions at home.
- It would appear that for every Canadian whose personal or family circumstances are interfering with performance at work, there are five Canadians whose work and work circumstances are interfering with their family and their life.
- Work-life conflict is impairing the health of many Canadians and creating problems within the family.
- The culture of the organization, which is set by the behaviour at the top, can sabotage the best attempts by organizations to help employees balance work and family.

- It is what managers do that counts – not what they say or what policies they implement.
- There are a number of problems with many organizations' work-life policies. Problems noted in this report include the following: no policies at all; policies that are not clear; inequity with respect to the ability to use the policies, and lack of accountability with respect to the use of the policies. The data also indicate that policies cannot help if the immediate manager does not apply them.
- Employees do not leave an organization – they leave bad management.
- Many Canadians feel that they are in a no-win situation with respect to balance – advance in their career or have a meaningful life outside of work.
- Temporary and part-time work has made balance more problematic for many.
- People who are not financially self-sufficient have more problems balancing work and family.

These conclusions further suggest that:

- Employers who wish to reduce the costs associated with high work-life conflict should seriously examine the comments, suggestions and recommendations given by the Canadians.
- Employees who wish to improve their own balance need to look at the strategies suggested by Canadians who have achieved some sort of balance.
- Governments at all levels need to place the work-life balance of Canadians at the top of their agenda if they wish to remain globally competitive.

Recommendations

There is no “one size fits all” solution to the issue of work-life balance. The data from this study show quite clearly that different policies, practices and strategies will be needed to accommodate employees at different stages of their careers and life cycles. That being said, the data indicate that there are a number of strategies and approaches that employers and governments can use to reduce work-life conflict. Recommendations targeted at both of these groups are given below.

What Can Employers Do to Reduce Work-Life Conflict?

To reduce work-life conflict and improve overall quality of life, employers need to focus their efforts on four sets of initiatives:

- increasing the number of supportive managers within the organization;
- providing flexibility around work;

- increasing employees' sense of control; and
- focussing on creating a more supportive work environment.

Specifically, we recommend that:

1. Employers should devote more of their efforts to improving “people management” practices within their organization. They can increase the number of supportive managers within the organization by giving managers at all levels:
 - a. *the skills* they need to manage the “people” part of their job (i.e. communication, conflict resolution, time management and project planning skills, how to give and receive feedback),
 - b. *the tools* they need to manage people (i.e. appropriate policies, the business case for support, training on how to implement alternative work arrangements, Web sites and other resources on how to handle different human resource problems, referral services to help employees deal with specific problems such as childcare and eldercare),
 - c. *the time* they need to manage this part of their job (i.e. people management has to be seen as a fundamental part of a manager's role, not just as an “add on” that can be done in one's spare time – an overworked manager finds it difficult if not impossible to be a supportive manager),
 - d. *incentives* to focus on the “people part” of their job (i.e. measurement and accountability, 360-degree feedback, rewards focused on recognition of good people skills, performance of the “people part” of the job should be part of promotion decisions, hiring decisions, etc.)
2. Employers need to provide employees with more flexibility around when and where they work. The criteria under which these flexible arrangements can be used should be mutually agreed upon and transparent. There should also be mutual accountability around their use – employees need to meet job demands, but organizations should be flexible with respect to how work is arranged. The process for changing hours or location of work should, wherever possible, be flexible.
3. It is very difficult (if not impossible) to implement flexible work arrangements in organizations where the focus is on hours rather than output and on presence rather than performance. This means that organizations that want to increase employees' work-life balance need to introduce new performance measures that focus on objectives, results and output (i.e. move away from a focus on hours to a focus on output). To do this they need to reward output, not hours, and what is done, not where it is done. They also need to publicly reward people who have successfully combined work and non-work domains and not promote those who work long hours and expect others to do the same.

4. Employers need to create more supportive work environments. While the preceding recommendations all aim to make the work environment more supportive, we recommend the following specific steps be taken by organizations that wish to focus their efforts on cultural change:
 - Work with employees to identify which types of support they would like (i.e. diagnose the situation) and which types could be accommodated within the organization. Not all supportive policies are feasible and practical in every context.
 - Develop and implement appropriate supportive policies. The development phase should include an analysis of the potential problems associated with the implementation of each policy and suggestions on how these problems could be addressed.
 - Communicate to employees the various policies that are available. Indicate how these policies can be accessed and any restrictions on their use. Repeat these communications on a regular basis (e.g. every couple of months). Publish data on the company's intranet.
 - Encourage employees to use the policies by having senior management model appropriate behaviour, conducting information sessions on the policies and how they can be used (e.g. “lunch and learns”), communicating how these policies are being used successfully in the organization and in others (i.e. communicate best practices), etc. Employees must be made to feel that their careers will not be jeopardized if they take advantage of supportive policies.
 - Measure the use of the different supportive policies and reward those sections of the organization that demonstrate best practices in these areas. Investigate those areas where use is low.
5. Employers should give employees the right to refuse overtime work. Some organizations may want to give management limited discretion to override the employee's right to refuse overtime (i.e. emergency situation, operational requirements), but this should be the exception rather than the rule. Implement time-off arrangements in lieu of overtime pay.
6. Employers should provide a limited number of days of paid leave per year for childcare, eldercare or personal problems.
7. Employers need to make it easier for employees to transfer from full-time to part-time work and vice versa. They should introduce pro-rated benefits for part-time work, guarantee a return to full-time status for those who elect to work part-time and allow an employee's seniority ranking and service to be maintained.
8. Employers need to examine workloads within their organizations. If they find that certain employees are consistently spending long hours at work (i.e. 50 or more hours per week), they should determine why this is occurring (e.g. career ambitions, unbalanced and unrealistic work expectations, poor planning, too many priorities, lack of tools and/or training to do the job efficiently, poor management, culture focused on hours instead of output) and how workloads can be made more reasonable.

What Can Governments Do to Reduce Work-Life Conflict?

We also recommend that governments take the following actions:

1. As one of the largest employers in the country, the federal government should, itself, become a best practice and model employer in the area of work-life balance (i.e. introduce appropriate policies, enact forward-thinking legislation, change accountability frameworks). Provincial governments should also take this tack. Such an approach will give governments the moral authority to ask for changes in this area from others.
2. The lack of availability of affordable, quality childcare services is, for many workers, a critical work and family issue. We echo many others when we recommend that the Government of Canada, in conjunction with the provinces, develop and implement a national childcare program that addresses the needs of children of all ages (i.e. affordable, quality daycare, supervision for older children, before and after school care, extracurricular programs).
3. Furthermore, in the context of a rapidly aging population and increasing life expectancy and the resulting greater need for working-age individuals to provide care for their parents or other elderly relatives, we recommend that the Government of Canada, in conjunction with the provinces, develop and implement a national eldercare program.
4. An elderly parent can require full-time care for a longer period than can be granted under short-term leave. This need is infrequently recognized. We recommend that labour legislation include specific language around long-term, unpaid leave for the care of a parent.
5. Governments should also make it easier for family members who wish to stay home to care for their children or elderly dependants. At this time, such a choice often has negative tax implications for the family.

The data also indicate that families who have greater financial resources are better able to cope with work-life balance. The exact causal mechanism is hard to determine but is probably linked to the fact that families with greater disposable incomes report higher perceived control (i.e. these employees feel they can afford to leave a non-supportive work environment, and can purchase goods and services that increase balance). This would suggest that one way to reduce work-life conflict is to find ways to “make work pay.” Options in this regard could include tax credits, changes to the minimum wage, etc.

Finally, it should be noted that policy makers will miss reaching the needs of real families if they continue to base public policy on outmoded definitions of what a family is. Many policies are based on decades-old definitions of a male breadwinner or the idealized nuclear family of mother, father and dependent children. Increased longevity, divorce and remarriage trends, and non-traditional family structures have changed what a “family” is. Public policy should reflect this.

Appendix A: Summary of Key Differences in Types of Comments Made

Groups within this category	Male	Female	Childcare		Eldercare		Job Type		Sector			Total
			Yes	No	Yes	No	Mgr & Prof.	Other	Private	NFP	Public	
Problems:												
• organizational level	47.9%	39.3%	39.7%	42.3%	43.9%	40.3%	42.8%	39.8%	41.9%	38.7%	41.3%	41.1%
• with balance	110%	12.5%	12.4%	12.2%	10.8%	12.0%	11.8%	12.7%	13.2%	13.5%	10.2%	12.4%
• at the family level	5.0%	10.1%	9.8%	7.9%	10.9%	8.0%	8.1%	9.0%	6.3%	9.9%	9.5%	8.7%
• at the individual level	2.2%	2.3%	1.7%	2.8%	2.1%	2.4%	2.1%	2.6%	2.0%	2.3%	2.5%	2.4%
Total : Problems	66.1%	64.2%	63.6%	65.2%	67.7%	62.7%	64.8%	64.1%	63.4%	64.4%	63.5%	64.6%
Positive comments regarding:												
• balance	1.8%	2.4%	1.8%	2.4%	1.1%	2.4%	2.5%	1.8%	2.1%	3.4%	1.5%	2.1%
• family	1.1%	1.7%	1.8%	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%	1.4%	1.6%	1.6%	1.8%	1.3%	1.4%
• manager	0.7%	1.3%	1.4%	1.1%	0.9%	1.5%	1.2%	1.2%	0.6%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%
• organization	3.6%	3.2%	3.3%	3.3%	2.4%	3.6%	4.2%	2.6%	3.7%	2.5%	3.6%	3.6%
• personal	1.1%	1.9%	1.4%	1.9%	1.3%	1.8%	1.3%	2.0%	1.8%	1.9%	1.7%	1.7%
Total : Positive	8.2%	10.5%	9.7%	10.0%	7.1%	10.8%	10.6%	9.2%	9.8%	10.7%	9.4%	10%
Recommendations:												
• organization	3.5%	3.4%	4.1%	3.2%	3.0%	3.8%	6.8%	9.3%	3.9%	2.6%	3.9%	3.5%
• policies	6.6%	8.6%	9.2%	7.7%	9.4%	8.0%	3.0%	4.5%	9.2%	7.3%	8.0%	8.3%
Total : Recommendations	10.1%	12.0%	13.3%	10.9%	12.4%	11.8%	9.8%	13.8%	13.1%	9.9%	11.9%	11.8%
Solutions:												
• balance	3.8%	4.4%	4.4%	4.5%	3.7%	4.7%	4.9%	4.1%	3.2%	4.8%	4.4%	4.4%
• family	1.4%	1.9%	1.8%	1.9%	1.7%	1.9%	1.8%	1.9%	2.4%	2.7%	0.9%	1.9%
• personal	6.8%	4.7%	5.3%	5.0%	4.9%	5.2%	5.3%	4.9%	5.5%	5.4%	5.2%	5.1%
Total : Solutions	12.0%	11.0%	11.5%	11.4%	11.3%	11.8%	12.0%	10.9%	11.1%	12.9%	10.5%	11.4%
None of the above	3.1%	2.2%	2.0%	2.6%	2.6%	2.3%	2.0%	2.6%	2.4%	2.3%	2.6%	2.3%

Appendix B: An Overview of the Coding Scheme

Part One: Challenges Faced by Employees with Respect to Balance (65% of all comments)

Organizational Problems (41% of all the comments)

Heavy Workloads (10%)

- Downsizing (2%)
- Unrealistic expectations (2%)
- Being a manager (1%)
- Inability to plan and to set priorities (1%)
- Lack of resources (1%)
- Lack of time (1%)
- Impact of technology (2%)

Non-Supportive Management (9%)

- Immediate manager does not treat the employee with respect (2%)
- Managers do not see their people management role as a priority (2%)
- Immediate manager acts as barrier to use of supportive policies
- A lack of leadership at the top (2%)
- The wrong people are being promoted into management positions **
- Upper management behaviour contributes to stress **
- Upper management do not model the appropriate behaviour **

Cultures that Do Not Support Balance (8%)

- Culture of hours (2%)
- Disconnected culture which is focused on policies rather than practice (1%)
- Culture conveys that it is money rather than people that is important (1%)
- Management culture (1%)
- Culture of backlash (1%)
- Culture of guilt
- Culture based on the myth of “separate worlds” (i.e. work or family)
- Hierarchical culture **

The Perception that One Has to Choose Between Career Advancement and Balance (4%)

- Strategy of putting family ahead of work (even when children are young) hurts career advancement (1%)
- Career development activities often make it more difficult to meet family demands (1%)
- Time crunch negatively affects career advancement
- Career advancement often depends on relocation, which is difficult to do in families where both partners are working
- Employees who make use of supportive policies will not get ahead **
- Career advancement means putting in the hours, which makes balance more difficult **

Work-Life Policies (3%)

- Policies are not clear
- Policies do not exist
- Inequity with respect to the ability to use the policies
- Policy versus practice – no accountability with respect to the use of the policies
- Comments on specific policies (2%) **

Too Much Change Makes Balance More Difficult (2%)

- Organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring and amalgamating increase workloads and work stress and make balance more problematic (1%)
- Too much change overwhelms an employee's ability to cope and makes balance more difficult (1%)

Temporary and Part-time Work (2%)

- Temporary employees do not get the same benefits as those working full-time
- The insecurity associated with temporary work is very stressful
- People who hold temporary jobs have less control over their work and non-work lives
- Canadians who cannot get permanent employment are delaying having families
- Part-time work is career-limiting **

Work-Related Travel (1%)

- Work-related travel increases stress
- Employees are not compensated for high travel demands **
- Work-related travel makes it hard to have a meaningful life outside of work **
- Work-related travel increases conflict at home **

Specific Challenges (3%)

Challenges facing the boomers
Stresses associated with teaching
Stresses associated with nursing
Safety concerns **
Demands exceed ability to cope **
Challenges facing unionized employees **
Poor working conditions **

Problems at the Work-Life Interface (12% of all the comments)

Role Overload (3%)

Role overload (2%)
Having too much to do and not enough time (1%)

Work and Family Roles Interfere with Each Other (6%)

Work interferes with family (2%)
Children and family interfere with work and career (2%)
Work and family interfere with time for self (1%)
Housework interferes with time for self and family
The commute to and from work interferes with time for self and family

Specific Challenges (3%)

Challenges associated with being a single parent (2%)
Challenges associated with living with a workaholic (1%)

Problems at the Individual or Family Level (11% of all the comments)

Personal (3%)

Death of a spouse or family member
Divorce or separation
Moving/change in residence – lack of support in community
Personal/mental health problems that made balance more difficult
Serious physical disorder that made balance more difficult
Dealing with being single **
Personal issues **

Circumstances at Home (6%)

Parenting (4%)
Not being able to stay home with children because money is tight (1%)
Lack of support for the traditional family (1%)
Responsible for both child and eldercare (sandwich generation) (1%)
Having primary responsibility for the family
Lack of time for self
Dealing with illness within the family
Caring for a disabled dependant
Family responsibilities overwhelming ability to cope

Eldercare (1%)

Responsible for the care of an elderly dependant
Financial responsibility for elderly dependant
Lack of supports for elderly dependants
Supporting one parent after the death of the other parent **
Eldercare is time-consuming and overwhelms an individual's ability to cope **

Financial Strains (1%)

Balance difficult due to the financial need to work more than one job
It is difficult to balance when there is no financial security
It is difficult to balance when money is tight
Work demands have increased but pay has not gone up accordingly **
Government policies/taxes make things more difficult financially **
Pay increases have not kept up with increases in cost of living **
Financial compensation below the industry average **
Financial worries contribute to stress **
Inability to survive on one income **

Part Two: Positive Observations with Respect to Work-Life Balance

Positive Comments on Work-Life Balance (10% of all the comments)

General Comments (5%)

Factors that contribute to balance (3%)
Family makes it possible (1%)
It gets easier – having grown or older kids
Young, single – and happy about it
Flexible work hours make balance possible **

The Organization (4%)

- Has implemented flexible work arrangements (2%)
- Offers a supportive, caring work environment (1%)
- Concretely supports work-life balance (1%)
- Supports a sense of team **

Immediate Manager (1%)

- Manager is supportive
- Manager understands the need for work-family balance
- Manager gives needed flexibility

Part Three: Achieving a Balance

Achieving a Balance (11% of all the comments)

Personal Strategies (6%)

- Use your faith to put life into perspective
- Be organized
- Recognize that balance takes work – and work at it
- Have goals
- Put things into perspective – “don’t sweat the small stuff”
- Enjoy life – focus on what is going well, not what is stressful
- Find a job you enjoy
- Have a supportive partner who does his or her share at home
- Remain fit and use exercise as a way to deal with stress

Make Choices and Set Priorities (5%)

- Consciously separate work and home
- Consciously put family first
- Reduce the amount of time spent in paid employment
- Choose shift work so one partner is at home to care for the children
- Learn to make do with less
- Have a partner who does not work outside the home
- Make time for hobbies and self
- Decide not to have children
- Postpone having children

Part Four: Recommendations

Recommendations (11% of all the comments)

Recommendations to Organizations (4%)

- Managers (2%)
- Organizational support of balance (1%)
- Daycare
- Fitness facilities

Recommendations at the Policy Level (8%)

- Benefits
- Increased flexibility with respect to hours of work
- Leave (i.e. maternity, paternity, family days, sick days, special leave)
- Reduce the amount of time employees spend in work
- Support for the traditional family
- Working from home **
- Flexible work arrangements **

** Not presented in this report. Please see the more complete set of comments on the authors' Web site at <http://groups.ivey.uwo.ca/bantamaa/>.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the percentage of all the coded comments that were grouped in this category of comments. All categories that are not marked represented less than 1% of the comments. Numbers were rounded to the closest decimal point and may therefore not add up exactly to 100.